

DOWN TO EARTH Greenery going fast

By ASM Nurunnabi

A couple of decades ago, Dhaka was a city of verdant beauty, particularly in the Ramna areas. That beauty has suffered gradual erosion with the steady growth of the urban population to meet their infra-structural requirements, like housing, road networks, commercial and industrial facilities.

The burgeoning process of urbanisation over the past few years has claimed, among its victims, the cruel denudation of trees in some areas which once contributed to their scenic attraction. Some of the sad casualties in this process were, for instance, the old big trees with their wealth of foliage near the main gate of the Old High Court building and at the Plas-

trees are planted by one agency, on the other hand such trees are cut down by another agency for their development work. This is primarily due to lack of coordination between concerned agencies which is deplorable.

Lately, the Rajuk is understood to have set up a committee to make suitable recommendations for planned plantation programme for the city. Though the committee's recommendations are yet to come out, the available indication is that the Rajuk will undertake a sizable programme for plantation from the beginning of the next monsoon season.

It is understood that other agencies also are supposed to take up similar programmes, but

it has not been possible to make sure whether actually they have such programmes or these are under their contemplation. Another redeeming feature in this context is the initiative reportedly taken by the Department of Forests and Environment. In their bid to improve the over-all situation, that department held a co-ordination meeting recently with the representatives of different government agencies with the object of taking coordinated action programmes for conservation and plantation. This co-ordination aspect, which was previously absent, is noteworthy and if actually implemented in the action programmes of the respective agencies, may go a long way in improving the situation.

It is further learnt that recently all agencies under various Ministries have been directed by the government to keep a tree planting component in their respective development programmes.

However, the observers believe that efforts of the government agencies alone may not suffice. What is also needed is the ecological awareness. While publicity in this behalf should continue through mass media, a political will is to be demonstrated by participation of elected representatives of the people in tree planting.

Under their auspices, plans are reportedly under way for plantation in Uttara, Baridhara, Shyampur (near Postagola), on both sides of Pragoti Sharanai and Janapath. Sadly enough, some trees previously planted by them on both sides of Janapath were lost within a year through lack of care and local spoliation.

Exact statistics appear to be lacking, but it seems clear that there has been a substantial depletion in the tree resources of the city. It has been observed that though on the one hand



Myanmar FM

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help Bangladesh. A British diplomat after her recent visit to Teknaf told The Daily Star, "We are ready to help the refugees provided the Bangladesh government permits us."

The government has set up four relief camps and plans to open two more soon for the refugees who are getting handouts of rice, wheat and bread.

Rabita Al Alam Islami, a Saudi Arabian relief organisation, and Gano Sasthya Kendra of Bangladesh are also doing some relief work distributing food and medicines.

The condition of the refugees are getting worse because of lack of food, medicines, sanitation and shelter.

Many refugees, living in the open air, are going either unfed or underfed. The women and children in particular are suffering from malnutrition, dysentery and fever.

"The situation is already bad and it will get worse when monsoon arrives," said Hugo Gurdon, South East Asia Correspondent of The Daily Telegraph of London after a visit to Teknaf.

BSS adds: About 5,000 Rohingyas crossed into Bangladesh through different frontier points of Bandarban and Cox's Bazar district in the past three days.

Most of them were children and women, official sources said.

The Rohingyas, who came into Bangladesh by boat, said they were evicted forcefully by the Myanmar government and as such the member of the Lunthin security force did not obstruct their journey to Bangladesh.

The district administration of Bandarban and Cox's Bazar have opened three new camps for the refugees. Two of them, are in Kutupalong and Marishapalong of Ukha upazila, while the other one is in Naikhangchari of Bandarban district.

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UK may drop bill to curb asylum-seekers

LONDON, Feb 14: The government said Thursday it will likely postpone a controversial bill to curb the number of asylum-seekers allowed into Britain, reports AP.

But Immigration Minister Peter Lloyd denied opposition claims he has shelved the Asylum Bill, which immigrant welfare groups and church leaders say is racially motivated and unfair.

The bill, passed by the House of Commons recently after heated debates, was due to be debated for the second time by the upper House of Lords on Feb. 24.

But the measure has disappeared from the Lords agenda. This makes its passage impossible if, as widely expected, Conservative Prime Minister John Major calls a general

election for April 9. The opposition Labour and Liberal Democratic parties said that the government had apparently decided to drop the bill.

But Lloyd said the measure would go through "unless there is an election very soon." "If there is an early election it will be reintroduced straightaway afterwards," he added in a radio interview.

The number of asylum-seekers, many from Third World countries, has soared from 5,000 in 1988 to 46,000 last year, the government says.

The bill provided a faster appeals system, fingerprinting of asylum seekers, rapid deportation of those refused and higher fines for airlines bringing in would-be immigrants without visas.

Pak Speaker's dance triggers sit-in

KARACHI, Feb 14: Pakistani police arrested 25 Muslim fundamentalists who blocked a road to protest a violation of Islamic custom by the National Assembly Speaker who danced with a woman at an embassy reception, reports AFP.

The group staged a sit-in and refused to disperse, calling un-Islamic the Lower House Speaker Gohar Ayub Khan's dance with a woman at an Indonesian Embassy party in Islamabad last month.

The local press reported Khan's dance with the women at the reception to celebrate Indonesia's National Day and published a photograph.

Witnesses said police allowed the group to finish saying prayers in the road and then took them away in a van.

The Midnight File

'True identity' of 'Dhanu'

COLOMBO, Feb 14: The SIT detectives probing Rajiv Gandhi's assassination have succeeded in establishing the 'true identity' of 'Dhanu', the woman suicide bomber who killed India's former Prime Minister near Madras on May 21 last year, intelligence sources here said, reports PTL.

Wave of attacks in Lima

LIMA, Feb 14: Guerrillas launched a wave of attacks around the capital Friday during a rebel-called strike, killing three policemen and leaving thousands of people stranded by scarce public transport. The so-called 'armed strike' by the fanatic Shining Path movement seeks to halt all commercial activity and transportation. Previous strikes have shut down major cities in the Andes mountains, reports AP.

Afghan refugee kills 8

PESHAWAR (Pakistan), Feb 14: An Afghan refugee killed eight people in a suburb of this city today, and local residents then shot him and his son dead, police sources said. Police said the refugee, identified as Khan Agha, was insane, adding that he had shot dead his sister and brother and injured his wife two days earlier, reports AFP.

Khaleda, Hasina attend Ansar, VDP cultural function

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia attended an attractive programme of Ansar and VDP cultural troupes at the Ansar headquarters here yesterday evening, reports BSS.

The programme, organised on the occasion of the 15th national conference of Ansars and VDPs, was attended, among others, by ministers, leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation Mirza Abbas, Cabinet Secretary Ayubur Rahman, Chief of the Army Staff Lt. Gen. Muhammad Nour Uddin Khan, secretaries and high civil and military officials.

50 train passengers injured

From Our Correspondent
NARAYANGANJ, Feb 14: At least 50 people were injured, 11 of them seriously, when the panic-stricken passengers of a Dhaka-bound train jumped from it near Fatulla today at about 7:30 pm, fearing something wrong with the train.



CELEBRATING ADVENT OF FALGUN: Clad in 'basanti' colour sarees they are enjoying a joke in a city park. —Star photo

Paid pretty candidates

BANGKOK, Feb 14: Pretty young women are being paid by political parties to register as candidates for next month's general election in Thailand as some parties scramble to meet the minimum requirement of 120 candidates, press reports today said, reports AP.

With Friday the last day for registering groups of young women were seen arriving at

Bangkok's city hall to sign up as candidates, and some have said they were being paid thousands of baht (hundreds of US dollars) to do so.

A group of eight dazzling young women, who could have easily qualified for a beauty contest, turned up to register for one party recently, said one paper, the English-language Nation.

Shaheed Day

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public joined it as spectators, as did a number of undercover police and intelligence officers.

Inaugurated by Abdus Salam, editor of the Pakistan Observer, the conference adopted a 14-point charter of demands, which clearly expressed the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, secular and socialist mood of the delegates.

The charter began with the words, "We do not war," in an allusion to the on-going combat between American-led forces and Korean communists aided by China. The charter called on the government of Pakistan to oppose "imperialist war-mongers" and demanded that atomic weapons be declared illegal.

The second point of the charter demanded a democratic republic for Pakistan, in place of the dominion of the British Commonwealth status, "so that all provinces with their separate languages would enjoy self-rule; all tribal peoples would have cultural freedom and local autonomy; and every citizen, regardless of race, nationality or religion would enjoy equal rights."

"Bengali, without Arabic alphabets, should be the state language," the youth conference charter said.

This issue of alphabets had become a crucial one by late 1948. Fazlur Rahman, central minister for education who just happened to be a Bengalee, initiated the conspiracy to replace the Bengali alphabet, which is derived from the Devanagari script, with Arabic ones.

He cobbled together a whole array of "reasons" to back his scheme, but none of that made any sense to most people of East Bengal. Most, in fact, saw it for what it really was: a conspiracy that was designed to lead to the total abolition of the Bengali language itself in the long run.

According to Abdul Matin and Ahmed Rafiq's "The History and Significance of the Language Movement," Bengalee intellectuals such as Syed Ali Ahsan, Syed Sajjad Hossain, Abul Kasem etc were party to this conspiracy through their campaign to "Islamise" the Bengali language.

From April 18, 1950 the central government in Karachi — but not the East Bengal government in Dhaka — undertook projects to "teach" Arabised Bengali to groups of adults in this country. The campaign to prevent Urdu from being imposed on the Bengalee people, therefore, had to be conducted while keeping a close watch on the conspiracy to destroy the Bengali language itself.

The Jubo League, which elected Mahmud Ali, editor of the Sylhet-based weekly Naobhad as its president and Oli Ahsad as its general secretary at its March, 1951 conference, began province-wide organisational activities through holding of cultural events.

Commemoration of poet Iqbal's death anniversary on April 13, and celebration of Rabindranath Tagore's anniversary of birth on May 13 were two of the major cultural events it undertook in 1951.

Hasina

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Hasina asked her party workers to build the organisation on a solid footing and play the leading role in removing sufferings of the neglected people.

City Awami League President Mozaffar Hossain Paltu presided over the meeting. Party central leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdul Jalil, Barrister Shawkat Ali Khan, Advocate Sirajul Islam and Abdul Mannan were present.

The meeting was adjourned till 10 am Saturday.

"Awami League will not deviate an inch from its movement for people's emancipation", Hasina said while addressing a separate meeting of newly-elected union parishad chairmen and different professional groups at their official residence at Minto Road.

Pointing out problems in different sectors, she said people cannot trust this government because of its "betrayal" with its pre-election promises to the electorate.

Hasina said that during the election campaign, BNP had pledged for ensuring full meals of rice for everybody. "But now its ministers are advising people to eat potato."

A party press release said newly-elected chairmen of four union parishads in Nazirpur thana of Pirojpur district, along with 100 people from different professional groups, formally joined the Awami League at the meeting.

The meeting was addressed, among others, by Sudhangshu Shekhar Halder MP, Pirojpur Awami League leaders Chandri Charan Pal and Advocate Rezaul Karim, and Ramkathi UP chairman Abdul Malek Bepari.

FIS abandons protest march

ALGIERS, Feb 14: Muslim fundamentalist leaders on Friday called off a banned anti-government march as gunfire rang out in the streets of the ancient capital, sending people running for cover, reports AP.

A group of gunmen attacked a police station in Algiers' central Casbah, injuring an unknown number of officers, authorities said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, automatic weapons fire clattered in the narrow streets of the quarter, not far from the Defence Ministry, national police headquarters and a prison where

Rival groups call hartal in Jessore today

JESSORE, Feb 14: An eight-hour hartal from 6 am was called in the town Saturday by District Jatiya Party protesting the arrest of a party leader and by the Shopowners' Association protesting attack by JP processionists, reports UNB.

The District Jatiya Party brought out a procession in the town today protesting the arrest of its leader Mariful Haq. Witnesses said that at one stage the processionists ransacked and looted 25 shops at Kapuria Patti, Doratana and Chowrasta of the town.

A shopkeeper received serious stab injury during the sudden attack, allegedly by JP processionists.

Tigers kill 15 soldiers

COLOMBO, Feb 14: Tamil rebels ambushed a government military patrol in the east Friday, killing 15 soldiers and wounding three others, officials said, reports AP.

top fundamentalist leaders were being held. The source of the shooting was not known.

The shooting was heard for more than an hour in downtown Algiers as army commando units and police swept through neighbourhoods searching for assailants who earlier fired on security forces on the Place de Martyrs, witnesses said.

At least one person was injured, they said.

An ambulance under police escort carried away the victim, whose identity was not known, according to the Algerian news agency APS.

In the city's mosques, Muslim leaders conducting prayers called on followers to disperse rather than march in defiance of a government ban, according to fundamentalist sources who spoke on condition of anonymity.

DSE

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tions of irregularities in DSE trading by its members, which have been eroding investors confidence in the capital market.

Sleeping partners are on the rise in DSE and accountability in its business is now virtually non-existent. The exchange now has 195 registered members but only 20 to 25 of them are reported to be active.

Daily share trading turnover in DSE has now dropped to taka 1.5 lakh at most from an average of Tk 5 lakh in previous years.

A recent official survey found that none of the nine DSE councillors is maintaining up-to-date personal balance sheets.

Officials said the government, in a bid to restore investors' confidence, has taken stringent steps to ensure that the DSE follows the regulations.

Besides the DSE members, the government has also asked the enlisted companies to submit their up-to-date balance sheets.

Various expert studies on the country's capital market over the last few years have recommended a comprehensive overhaul in the Dhaka Stock Exchange.



Md. Jahangir Alam of Bangladesh Army scaled 3.80 metres to win the pole vault gold medal on the concluding day of the 20th national athletics championships at the Army Stadium yesterday. —Star photo by Enamul Haq

ORBIS arrives today

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also a member of the international advisory board of ORBIS, said the ORBIS team will treat pre-selected patients needing interior-segment surgery, vitreo-retinal surgery, oculo-plastic surgery, glaucoma and paediatric ophthalmological patients.

The activities of ORBIS will also act as a demonstrative training process for local physicians. "We have decided to send 60 local doctors everyday, 30 each from the public and private sectors, for practical hands-on training on board the airplane," Dr Rahman said. Five nurses will also be sent on board everyday.

There will be four staff ophthalmologists in the ORBIS team and another three to four physicians of different specialties will also join the team every week, he explained.

The ORBIS team will also hold a number of lecture sessions in different hospitals in

the capital during their stay here. A three-day training course for nurses will be organised at the Islamia Eye Hospital, the National Institute of Ophthalmology and at the Institute of Post Graduate Medicine and Research (IPGMR).

Final selections of patients will be made by the ORBIS team on three occasions for the three week programme. Patients needing interior-segment and vitreo-retinal surgery will be selected on Sunday at the Islamia Eye Hospital. The second batch will be selected on February 23 at the National Ophthalmological Institute and the third batch will be selected on March 1 at the Ophthalmological Society Hospital in Mirpur.

"We have already advised the local physicians to conduct pre-selection of patients and defer the cases for final selection by the ORBIS team," Dr Rahman said.

Khulna

From Page 1 Col 4

roads. And its sewerage is little better than non-existent. But these are not the best proofs of its impending decay. Mongla is the key to its revival — and to a matching industrialisation that would justify a big efficient Mongla.

But Mongla cannot be a panacea. Much will depend on the quality of the people of the area. In a way Bagerhat is a Sundarbans town and Khulna is the capital of the world's biggest mangrove forest. And you wouldn't find a high-standing tree on your way to the Sonadanga outskirts and its surroundings. No fault of the forest people. They keep planting saplings in thousands — wave after wave, spell after spell. All to no avail. The locals take a strange pleasure in uprooting any sapling — even if that be of a man's height. Even a revived Mongla will take a long time to heal the vandal in the ordinary man dehumanised by a stalled industrialisation and resulting unemployment.