

# DOWN TO EARTH

## Quest for a breath of air

By A S M Nurunnabi

In a metropolitan city a variety of facilities exist for the recreation of its citizens. Regrettably, in the Dhaka city, such facilities are very limited. For this a number of factors are responsible. In the context of our social ethos, the recreational needs of the majority of the citizens are simple in nature. Yet in the frenzy of rapid urban growth, it has not been possible to meet them.

Existence of open spaces and parks provides recreation in simple form. These simple needs are either gradually shrinking or are inadequate. Dhaka city once prided itself on its large open spaces, particularly in the Ramna area, with plenty of "Krisnachura" trees. When such trees were in bloom, the entire area burst into a riot of colour, as if on fire. With most of these trees gone the vacant landscape raises nostalgic memories in old-timers. In winter also, the verdant areas used to acquire a singular appeal, as a mild nip in the air merged with bright sunshine.

The old part of the city also had its open spaces. Though they were few in number, they seemed to meet the needs of the time, as the density of population was low.

The city has since passed through momentous changes in course of about four decades, first as a provincial capital and then as a capital of an independent country. Inexorably, the process of growth and development took its toll on the available open spaces.

Now most of the city's important open spaces are no longer available for the citizens' recreational use. The Ramna Park and the Suhrawardy Uddyan have lately lost much of their charm because of growing presence of anti-social elements. The Shishu Park is an attractive place for children. Lately, its attraction has greatly eroded on account of the presence of elders and non-function of some of its mechanical recreational facilities. In the Sangsad Bhaban area, some tempting open spaces are still available, but when evening sets in, the fear from anti-social elements looms in that area also.

In Old Dhaka, the Armentifola maidan, Bahadur Shah Park, the Buriganga river fronts have all lost their charm as open spaces because of heavy encroachments made by

trucks, buses, rickshaws, hawkers and roadside shops.

The problem of scarcity of open spaces is compounded by the ever-growing propensity of political parties and various organisations to use the open spaces available for their meetings, gatherings and other action programmes.

Other recreational aspects cover movies and the theatres. The movie has lost much of its importance on account of the burgeoning popularity of home videos. Besides, the inordinate rush at movie houses causes many to avoid them.

As regards theatres, there exists a lot of interest and enthusiasm for them. But the existing show houses are very few. The Mahila Samity and Girl Guides auditorium are all that we have in this big metropolis. There is one other auditorium within the precincts of the Usmani Uddyan which is reserved for select cultural functions not open to general public.

In other advanced countries, art galleries, museums and public libraries also provide an outlet for intellectual recreation. These facilities in our city are now at a nascent stage and do not have enough pull with those having intellectual interests. Of course, for a poor country like ours with a low literacy rate, asking for full-fledged facilities for such sophisticated recreation forms makes a tall order.

The other day a friend was asked how he passed his three-day Eid-ul-Azha holidays. He looked helpless and said that a three-day holiday should not be considered a long one.

Yet to enjoy a holiday of that duration poses a problem in this city, since one cannot even venture on a quiet walk in a park with one's family members because of the presence of dubious elements there.

What can be done to improve the existing situation? Some people think that in the existing state of things there may be limited scope for improvement even if the town planners may try for it. The old areas in Dhaka are in greater need for open spaces. There is a project for shifting the Dhaka Central Jail to a more spacious site near Shaipur in Gazipur district. When that project is implemented, quite a big area in the heart of old Dhaka will be available. It is for the town planners to consider whether, instead of utilising that area for any commercial or residential complex, which will further add to the existing congestion, the area could be used for a properly laid-out public park with ancillary facilities. This may largely compensate for the loss already taken place of other open spaces in the old part of the city.

What is more important immediately, according to some people, is to ensure adoption of appropriate measures to keep the existing open spaces free from encroachments and also to remain vigilant that the atmosphere in these areas is not vitiated through the presence of anti-social elements. This can be possible if the law-enforcing agencies, the City Corporation and RAJUK remain alert and active in their respective spheres.



### 5 hurt in city hospital clash

By DMCH Correspondent

At least five people were injured, three of them seriously, when a group of employees of Sarkari Karmachari Hospital (SKH) attacked their colleagues in the hospital premises at Fulbaria Friday morning.

Of the victims, Abdus Salam, 18, Shamsul Mondol, 24 and Sohrab, 26, were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) with serious injuries.

Meanwhile, SKH sources said, a group of armed men led by Ratan, an employee of the hospital attacked those belonging to their rival group at around 8 am.

The sources also said that the attack was made as a sequel of a previous quarrel between the two groups.

### Delhi to limit expenditure of ministries

NEW DELHI, July 3: The Indian government has decided that its ministries will not be allowed to spend beyond specified limits, reports Xinhua.

To enforce this the expenditure limits will be fixed on a monthly basis. The Observer of Business and Politics reported today.

All government banks notified that cheques issued by any ministry or department should not be honoured if these are exceeded.

The government also decided that it will no longer issue guarantees on loans taken by loss making public sector units as a matter of routine.

### Yugoslav bloodbath

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return fire, the Yugoslav Tanjug news agency reported. The United Nations has promised upto eight relief flights Friday to provide food and medicine for the city's nearly 400,000 people. They have been under siege by Serb forces for the past 87 days.

The planes came hours after hundreds of Canadian peacekeeping troops arrived in Sarajevo to secure the airport, and the road to the city.

Two US Air Force C-130 transport planes arrived with forklifts, generators and 10 tons of military rations to start the US effort, called Operation Provide Promise. A British Royal Air Force C-130 also flew to Sarajevo loaded with medicine and food.

The US Air Force expects to send two C-130 transports a day for 15 to 30 days.

The planes arriving Friday stopped over the Zagreb in neighbouring Croatia, where a UN command post coordinated the mounting airlift. Transports from Norway, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and Greece were also expected to be dispatched Friday.

In Washington Thursday, President Bush warned Serbian forces that he is prepared to back up Canadian troops if needed to keep the airport open.

Meanwhile, Milan Pantic, a Serbia-born American businessman who was appointed premier of Yugoslavia, was expected Friday in Belgrade, capital of the federation that now includes just Serbia and Montenegro.

The appointment was seen as an effort to ease Western pressure over Serbia's role in

fomenting ethnic fighting in Bosnia and Croatia.

Bosnia says at least 7,440 people have died in fighting since the majority Muslims and Croats voted for independence Feb. 29. With the help of the army, Serb militias seized about two thirds of Bosnia after the vote.

In Washington Thursday, Panic (pronounced PAHN-itch) said he planned to work with the UN to end the conflict. He said he would make sure all Yugoslav army troops are withdrawn from Bosnia and would try to restrain Serb irregulars. Panic said he hoped to get the UN to lift the trade embargo it imposed on Yugoslavia.

### Hasina slates VAT on clinics

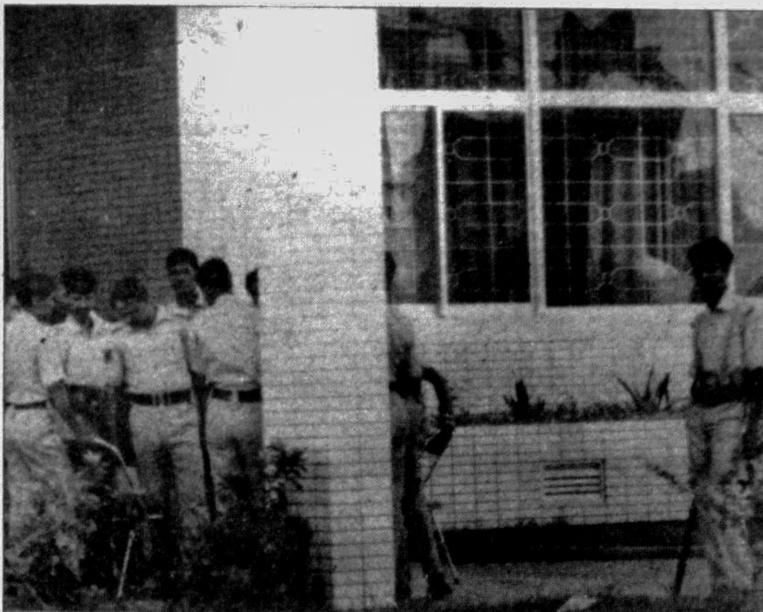
Leader of the Opposition in parliament Sheikh Hasina has criticised imposition of VAT (Value Added Tax) on clinics, saying that it will increase expenditure of medical treatment, reports UNB.

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in parliament made the remark when a delegation of Bangladesh Private Clinics Association met her at 29 Minto Road yesterday (Friday).

The delegation was led by Association President Prof Syeda Firoza Begum and General Secretary Dr Maniruzzaman Bhuiyan.

Dr Fakhru Islam Chowdhury, Dr Akhtaruzzaman, Dr Badiuzzaman Bhuiyan, Dr A B M Harun, Dr Mrs Halima, Dr Ashikul Alam, Dr Mohammad Abul Kalam, Dr Jahangir Alam, Dr Didarul Alam and Awami League Asstt. Publicity Secretary Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin were present during the meeting.

The physicians said when the government hospitals are only capable of providing health service to a small section of the vast multitude, the VAT on clinics will affect the general public. They termed VAT on clinics as against public interest.



Heavily armed police contingent guarding the Chinese Embassy Complex at Baridhara diplomatic enclave yesterday following Thursday's mob attack on the mission. — Star photo

## Scimitar deal

the Government.

An official level committee set up by the Government found the allegations made by the Kamal Commission, of which incumbent Energy Minister Dr Khondoker Mosharrar Hossain was a member, to be correct.

Some of the major violations of the Scimitar, registered in Panama, included 1) assigning 75 per cent of the company's share to another foreign company without seeking concurrence of the Government, 2) drilling of only two wells over a period of four years against a mandatory obligation of drilling six during the period, 3) non-submission of audited balance sheets and financial statements to the relevant authorities in time, 4) introduction of one Hany M Salam, reportedly a director of the company, as its chairman and giving a purported proposal to the government in late 1990 to sign a new PSC.

There have been allegations galore against what the officials call the dubious company since its operation in Bangladesh.

The Scimitar drilled its first appraisal well called Surma-1 in 1988 but experts found technical problems with the well. Due to the trouble, the company had to sidetrack to reach the pre-determined depth.

Scimitar tried to show this one well as two — Surma-1 and Surma-1(A).

It tried to consider the sidetrack portion, Surma 1 (A), as a separate well which the Petrobangla could not accept because every well must have a separate entry point.

The Scimitar, officials said pleaded for considering it as one and-a-half well. The incident has got currency as a joke in the oil industry circle.

According to sources, the Scimitar at one stage tried to sell part of its exploration rights to other entities — one of them being a major American oil company, Occidental.

The Scimitar's desperate attempts to peddle part of its rights stemmed from the dire needs for funds to fulfil its contractual obligations.

The one exploratory well it drilled in the Jalalabad structure was a gas recovery. The Scimitar claimed the reserves to be one TCF plus.

But people who reviewed the technical documents ex-

pressed reservations about the estimates.

Official sources said Scimitar attempted to sell this gas to India. However, it had one constraint — how the gas recovery would be shared was not clearly spelt out in the PSC.

Since Scimitar could not meet its contractual obligations, so fate of its contract depended on Petrobangla's giving it the required extension of time.

Rumour had it that Scimitar would go for legal action against the Petrobangla. But it did nothing of the sort rather sought extension of its period of operation in Sept last year under "Force Majeure" clause, only to be rejected by the Petrobangla.

He termed the situation as "very unfortunate" and assured the Chinese Ambassador Chen Songlu of taking stern measures against the culprits.

Rahman pointed out that an enquiry commission has already been formed by the government to probe into the incident. Additional Foreign Secretary A H Mahmood Ali accompanied the Foreign Minister during his visit.

Giving reactions on the incident diplomatic sources Friday said that Thursday's attack was positively an incident to be condemned.

However, they said that the incident would not hamper the traditional and age-old ties between the two friendly nations as neither the government nor any conscientious people were involved in it.

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### SAARC FMs talk progress on Dhaka summit next week

COLOMBO, July 3: South Asian foreign ministers will meet in Colombo next week to review progress made by their regional association and to prepare the groundwork for a summit in Dhaka in December, it was announced today, reports AFP.

The foreign ministers of the South-Asian Association for Regional Cooperation will hold talks next Wednesday and Thursday, after a meeting of SAARC foreign secretaries, also in Colombo, an official statement said.

It said the ministerial meeting would discuss progress made since the Sixth SAARC Summit in Colombo six months ago, and also help prepare for the seventh summit to be hosted by Bangladesh.

SAARC groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

### Ramos appoints Pundato as his Muslim adviser

MANILA, July 3: President Fidel Ramos today appointed Dimasangky Pundato, a former Muslim rebel leader, as his Muslim affairs adviser in a gesture of goodwill toward the Philippines' largest religious minority, reports AFP.

Pundato is a former commander of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which waged a war for Muslim independence in southern provinces in the 1970s. Ramos was then a paramilitary official who helped crush the bloody uprising.

With Pundato's appointment, Ramos issued a statement greeting the estimated five million Muslims in this largely Roman Catholic Nation of 62 million of the occasion of the Islamic new year.

"I sincerely hope that its message of universal brotherhood inculcates in the consciousness of our people the recognition that national development can only attain fulfilment through our common and undivided efforts," he said.

### Chinese Embassy

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Complex at Baridhara Thursday evening damaging its vehicles and property.

The attack followed a rumour that human skulls were found inside the embassy complex, an allegation brushed aside by the mission officials.

Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman Thursday afternoon visited the newly-completed but partially damaged Chinese Embassy in the capital.

The Foreign Minister went round the embassy complex to see the extent of damage and expressed his shock at Thursday's mob attack on the mission.

He termed the situation as "very unfortunate" and assured the Chinese Ambassador Chen Songlu of taking stern measures against the culprits.

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### Premadasa to visit SAARC states in Sept

COLOMBO, July 3: Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa will begin visits to the seven member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in September, officials said today. The visits would be Premadasa's first foreign mission since becoming President in 1988, reports BSS.

"We are in the process of finalising dates and in a broad sense it is correct that the visits would start from about September," a senior official said.

Premadasa, who is the current SAARC chairman was planning to visit Islamabad first and then travel to the capitals of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Maldives, officials said. The exact dates were still being finalised.

At the seventh SAARC summit, scheduled to be held in Dhaka in December, Premadasa is due to hand over the chairmanship of the regional grouping to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh.

## The Midnight File

### ANC rejects Klerk's offer

JOHANNESBURG, July 3: A top ANC official on Friday rejected President F W de Klerk's bid to revive stalled political talks, extending the impasse on how to end white minority rule. Thousands of angry blacks, meanwhile, marched through the dusty Boipatong black township to protest last month's massacre of more than 40 people and to demand action against their attackers, reports AFP.

### 12 arrested in Algeria

ALGIERS, July 3: Algerian security services have arrested 12 people in the eastern coastal city of Annaba in connection with the assassination of President Mohammed Boudiaf there Monday, sources said today. The sources specified neither the identities of those arrested, nor the extent of their alleged implication, reports AFP.

## Five killed as troops open fire in Kashmir

SRINAGAR (India), July 3: A burst tyre panicked security forces into opening fire and killing five bystanders Thursday as India's Interior Minister ended a two-day tour of the valley, police sources said, reports AFP.

The security personnel deployed in the Lal Chowk (Red Square) area here opened fire "indiscriminately" in a reflex action, thinking that a grenade had been set off by Muslim militants, the sources said, adding that two died instantly and three others later.

However, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said only two men were killed and 12 injured in the gunfire.

Senior Superintendent of Police Rajinder Singh, who visited the scene, described the incident as "shocking".

"A probe will be ordered immediately and the guilty will be punished," he told AFP.

Elsewhere in the troubled Kashmir valley, Muslim mili-

tants hurled a grenade at a security vehicle on the highway linking Srinagar with Kashmir's winter capital, Jammu, killing one officer and injuring three others.

A massive hunt was underway for the attackers who struck in the Khonum area near the highway, which had been cordoned off by security forces, an official news release here said.

The incidents were reported as Federal Home Minister Shankarrao Chavan ended a two-day visit to the valley, saying he had found a "qualitative improvement rapidly taking place" in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state.

Muslim militants are waging a violent campaign for Kashmir's secession from Indian rule, with some demanding accession to neighbouring Pakistan and some favouring outright independence, in a campaign which has left thousands dead.

### Direct flight to Delhi soon

NEW DELHI, July 3: Bangladesh's national carrier Biman will airtank Dhaka and New Delhi by operating a direct flight to the Indian capital, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, reports AFP.

The decision was taken Thursday at the end of two days of talks between civil aviation officials of the two countries during which the Indian side offered Bangladesh training, technical and flight inspection facilities, the news agency said.

Traffic rights agree to at the talks will permit Biman to operate its planned flight beyond New Delhi to New York, it said, but specified no date for the inaugural flight.

No reciprocal flights to Dhaka by Indian airlines were mentioned. The two national carriers presently operate between Calcutta and Dhaka.

The agreement came a day after Sri Lanka's national carrier, Air Lanka, announced direct airtanks between Colombo and New Delhi. Travellers from both countries presently transit at other airports before flying to each other's capital.

### DU VC

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gagement in jobs outside the university, and amendment to some articles of the University Ordinance.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday the VC said that the allegations against the DU teachers were not absolutely baseless.

"I think it is true only about a few of the teacher" he added saying "we have to solve the problems through discussions with both students and teachers."

On the cancellation of the Honours Degree of Ansar Ali the DU VC said that the decision had been taken through a legal process first by the Disciplinary Committee and the Academic Council of the University and finally it was approved by the Syndicate.

"I am ready to take any step for restoring peace on the campus," the DU VC affirmed.

About the July 7 ultimatum given by the CPRS, the VC said "Let's see what happens."

The relation between the general teachers and students were normal, a Syndicate member said adding "I think the incident of ransacking of the Proctor Office, Teachers' lounge and some class rooms of the Arts Building that took place last week was motivated."

The Syndicate member alleged that "a section of people" was taking advantage of the situation.

"The students could come to the proper authority with the allegation against teachers," the Syndicate member added.

According to reliable sources, the Dhaka University authority is going to take measures against some of the teachers who are involved in 'non-academic' activities outside the campus.

### Jamaat

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held a meeting yesterday (Friday) with Acting Ameer Abbas Ali Khan in the chair.

The meeting reviewed the political situation arising out of what it described as midnight understanding and accord between BNP and Awami League.

In a resolution, the meeting accused deputy leader of parliament Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury, Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain, deputy leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad and Opposition Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim of "interfering with rule of law, judiciary and the Constitution" by signing the agreement.

The Jamaat Majlis-e-Shoora was of the view that the manner in which the parliament is being run by ruling BNP and the major opposition Awami League has created doubt and confusion in the minds of the people.

It demanded immediate release of Golam Azam and warned the government and concerned quarters against any further conspiracy.

### Floods

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down during the period more than 1,000 families took shelter at the Brahmaputra flood protection embankment due to the unabated erosion.

Twenty five villages of the three thanas of Kazipur, Sirajganj and Chouhali still remained under water.

Kazipur Health Complex, the thana building, Meghai Hat and eight villages on the western side of the embankment also went under water.

Another report said: Two people were reported missing after a country boat capsized with 12 passengers aboard at Uzan Newakhol Char at about 7.30 pm on Thursday.

Witnesses said 10 people swam ashore but Fazlu (60) and his 14 years old grandson were missing.

At least 610 families were rendered homeless in two thanas of Manikganj due to continued erosion in river Jamuna and Padma during the last three days, official sources said.

Standing crops on 500 acres of land were also eroded by the river erosion in the worst affected Daulatpur and Hariampur thanas.

According to official sources, about 200 houses of Borotoa and Lautara villages of Daulatpur thana were washed away by the Jamuna rendering about 310 families shelterless.

The other affected villages are Varanganpur, Kamarpura, Paikusa, Ramnarapur, Boudiayla, Borotia, Pakialdaffar and Bachamara leaving 165 families homeless.

In Hariampur at least 155 families were affected as Padma swallowed parts of villages of Ramkisnapur, Vartikandi, Badarpur, Madhyakandi and Ujankandi.

Jamuna rose 12 cm at Aricha point Thursday threatening Aricha ghat and its adjoining areas, BIWTA sources said.

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