

DOWN TO EARTH

City's Book Trade in Doldrums

By A S M Nurunnabi

One of the tokens of civilised life is books. Thomas Carlyle said, "A true university of these days is a collection of books." In this respect, the educated sections of Dhaka's citizens have been missing a great deal. This deprivation has slowly built up since the early seventies.

The aftermath of the War of Liberation had left its mark in this area also. Here recovery has been slow, as higher priorities had to be given to the rebuilding of other areas of national life. Since intellectual pursuits depend a great deal on books, it is necessary that appropriate climate prevails in the book trade. Unfortunately, all is not going well with it.

The city's book trade is mainly located in Banglabazar, New Market and the Dhaka Stadium. In Shantinagar, Dhanmandi, Nikhet and Gulshan areas, there are some bookshops numbering about 30-35. Some bookshops have also sprung up near educational institutions.

The Banglabazar area has the largest concentration of bookshops, both wholesale and retail. A brisk trade also goes on here in old books. All kinds of text books from school to university level are available in this area. An important field of their activities, however, lies in the publication and sales of note books and guide books on various subjects.

In the New Market, there are about 40 bookshops. Most of these shops deal in selective imported books on various subjects, such as engineering, medical, law, etc. besides text books of schools, colleges and universities.

In the Stadium bookshops which number about eight, there is a greater emphasis on imported books on various subjects. In this respect, the New Market and the Stadium bookshops have the same characteristics.

The book-sellers do not seem to have any complaint

against the present book import policy. Import is made entirely under the wage earners scheme under which any quantity of books can be imported. This policy has several advantages: It substantially brought down the market price of books and a variety of books can be imported except pornography and horror comic books. Another redeeming feature is that no VAT is charged on book sales. The book-sellers have, however, one reservation about the import of magazines and periodicals which should be done according to an approved list. The book-sellers complain that this list leaves out some popular magazines and periodicals with the result that their smuggling is encouraged, and these magazines and periodicals are easily available on city pavements.

Asked whether, on account of the comparatively easy market because of the present import policy, there is any notable increase in the sales of books, some book-sellers expressed the opinion that though there has been a substantial reduction in the price of foreign books, its reflection on their sales is not considerable on account of the poor purchasing power of the readers.

Similar effect is noticeable also in the sale of locally produced books. In this context, some book-sellers point out that our local books are priced some-what higher than the books imported, for example, from India and their production quality is not as satisfactory.

In their opinion, inspite of some reduction, the prevailing prices are, by and large, considered prohibitive by most potential buyers who make their purchases only when they must. As a result, a limited readership is generally the prevailing picture for most of the books.

Incidentally, some book-

sellers pointed out that the present import policy does not lay down a clear-cut policy regarding import of educational aids, such as puzzles for children, educational cassettes connected with TOEFL books, etc. As a result, customs authorities raise objection to their import, although these are harmless and there is a high demand for them. The inevitable consequence is that these articles find their way into the market through unauthorised channels with high price tags.

In the field of publication, there are also some problems, according to a section of publishers. Firstly, there are few good publishers who do justice to the authors. The general complaint of the authors is that though their publishers print a higher number of books, they show a lesser number in their account to the authors, with the result that the authors get discouraged with reduced amount of royalties from the publishers. When some of the authors try to publish their work at their own cost, their attempt in most cases is not crowned with success because they do not possess the necessary network for publicity and distribution.

Some book-sellers are of the opinion that in our export trade with India in Bangali books, we do not fare very well because of our poor production quality and comparatively high price.

In our city, there is no dearth of bibliophiles. This is amply demonstrated at the time of book fairs held on the occasions of "Ekushhey" February and the Bengali New Year.

The substantial discounts allowed on these occasions tended to create a brisk trade. It is the fond hope of every book-lover that this trend be maintained at other times by effecting greater economy in production costs, so that books are available at reduced prices.



Renowned singer, Runa Laila at a solo charity show organised by VOICE to help raise funds for artistes in distress at Hotel Sheraton yesterday. —Star photo

Russia to supply critical defence spares to India

NEW DELHI, Aug 21: Russia will supply critical military spare parts to help India's armed forces cope with severe shortages following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Defence Minister Sharad Pawar was quoted today as saying, reports AFP.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted Pawar, in the federal territory of Daman off mainland India's west coast, as saying Moscow's assurance was part of an extended credit facility promised in July by Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

"India's defence preparedness would be maintained by expediting supplies of critical defence spares and technological support under a Russian 400 million dollar credit facility," Pawar told reporters.

The Defence Minister said he would soon leave for Moscow to urge the Russians to "expedite the supplies" so the Indian armed force would "overcome the shortages," PTI said.

Pawar's announcement reduce fears over the critical shortages of military spare parts from Russia, which earlier this year ratified a friendship and cooperation treaty with New Delhi but left the key supplies to India hanging.

India's mig jet fighters, T-series tanks, corvettes, frigates and aircraft carriers faced a massive spares crunch following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which once supplied 60 per cent of the country's military hardware. The

shortages forced India to reverse its defence plans last year encouraging it to turn toward western countries, especially the United States, for alternative sources of military supplies and officer training programmes.

The Defence minister said he had asked army, navy and air force chiefs "to spell out their top priorities for the next two to three years" so that essential supplies from Moscow could be sent more quickly.

"The country's defence preparedness could not be compromised despite the serious financial crunch," he said, adding that funds would be "somehow arranged" to strengthen coast guard forces.

The coast guard has a vital role in safeguarding offshore installations and supports the navy in checking the drug trade and gunrunning off the country's west coast, Pawar said during a coast guard investiture ceremony.

India was still hopeful of receiving US cooperation in a light combat aircraft project and rotor craft package, although success in an indigenous missile technology programme have prompted Washington to slap a two-year ban on its main space agency.

Earlier this year, the two countries conducted their first joint naval exercise, in the Arabian Sea. Pawar said he was hopeful similar exercises would be conducted with China.

Govt harbouring killers : BCL

By DU Correspondent

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) (M-1) leaders Friday demanded government ban on politics of Jamaat-e-Islami, Freedom Party and Jubo Command.

They also demanded speedy arrest of the assassins of Workers Party General Secretary Rashed Khan Menon MP.

Speaking at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka, they accused the present government of flouting the joint declaration of the three political alliances during the anti-autocracy movement.

They said that the government had been harbouring the "killers of 1971 and 1975" ignoring people's demand for their punishment.

The August 20 dawn-todusk hartal had registered people's resentment against the terrorists as well as a no-confidence in the ruling party, they said.

The leaders of BCL, student wing of Awami League, said that police had arrested the Dhaka city (South) BCL President Shaiful Alam and General Secretary Akhter Hossain on the eve of the hartal.

BCL President Mainuddin Hasan Chowdhury spoke at the press conference while General Secretary Iqbalur Rahim, Dhaka University unit leaders K H M Liza and Pankaj Nath were present among others.

Hasina

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dire consequences if she tried to hang on to power through killing and repressing the people. "None can stay in power through the use of terrorism and oppression", she reminded the PM.

Saying that her party was cooperating with Khaleda's government, the AL chief felt that the people had expressed their lack of confidence in this government by observing hartals on August 15 and August 20.

The AL leader emphatically said she was ready to shed blood for establishing the rights of the Bengali nation for which her father, Sheikh Mujib, and other family members had made their supreme sacrifices.

Chaired by city AL President Mozaffar Hossain Paltu, the meeting was also addressed by central leaders of the party, including Abdul Mannan, Mohtuddin Ahmed, MP, Tofael Ahmed, MP, Begum Matia Chowdhury, MP, and Mozaffar Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Bir Bikram.

ROK, China to set up ties

SEOUL, Aug 21: South Korea and China will sign an agreement to set up full diplomatic ties next week, a national news agency report said today, writes AFP.

South Korean Foreign Minister Lee Sang-Ock and his Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen will sign the agreement in Beijing Monday, the national Yonhap news agency said, quoting government sources.

Nirmul body

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leaders of hatching a plot to lead the country towards a civil war.

"We want that the government should take immediate steps against the conspirators," the leaders said and warned that the pro-liberation forces would not tolerate any plot against the independence and sovereignty of the country.

The resistance committee leaders also resented the government failure in improving the law and order situation of the country.

They condemned the Home Minister's statement in an interview with BBC on law and order and continued terrorism.

The Midnight File

Benazir warns Sharif of revolution

MURREE (Pakistan), Aug 21: Pakistan opposition leader Benazir Bhutto warned Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif today that a failure to form a national government and call new elections could spark revolution. "Benazir will march up to Islamabad and every child of this country will march with me," the former Prime Minister said. Bhutto was addressing a large rally in the hill resort of Murree, 50 km (30 miles) east of Islamabad, as part of her campaign to drum up public opinion against Sharif, reports Reuter.

Six killed in Ukraine coalmine blasts

KIEV, Aug 21: A series of explosions at a coalmine in eastern Ukraine killed six miners and rescue workers and left 10 trapped underground today, local journalists said. They said Vladimir Shepelenko, Director of the Skochinsky mine near the city of Donetsk, told them the explosions had been caused by a buildup of gas. Twenty-three people had been taken to hospital, the journalists said, reports Reuter.

Sarajevo shelled

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tack on the barracks Friday morning, said Darko Markovic, a Bosnian soldier at the barracks. No injuries were reported.

A Ukrainian peacekeeper was killed Thursday by sniper fire there, becoming the second UN peacekeeper to die of wounds suffered in Sarajevo. More than a dozen peacekeepers have been injured.

In Thursday night's shelling, the heaviest in the Bosnian capital in weeks, the main Kosovo hospital was hit, as were the Parliament building and the presidency. Both buildings caught fire.

The Belgrade-based Tanjug news agency reported that forces of the Muslim-led Bosnian government shelled the Serb headquarters at Pale, east of Sarajevo, late Thursday.

Friday morning, Sarajevo residents lined up for bread and water from tanker trucks. Water and electricity supplies are often cut.

Also on Friday, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, head of a special UN human rights team, was to arrive in former Yugoslavia to begin a mission to collect independent evidence.

Joint commission

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tain cordial and friendly relations since the birth of Bangladesh in 1971.

The programme of Malaysian Foreign Minister includes a visit on Monday to port city Chittagong where he will see the facilities available at the Export Processing Zone (EPZ). He will also meet the leaders of Chamber of Commerce and Industry there.

In the same evening, the minister will attend and function in Dhaka arranged on the eve of two-day exhibition of Malaysian palm oil.

During his stay in Dhaka, Datuk Abdullah will call on President, Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Labour and Manpower Minister.

High officials of Malaysia's Foreign Ministry, Agriculture Ministry, Youth and Sports Ministry, Human Resource Ministry, International Trade Ministry, Primary Industries and three palm oil experts will accompany the Foreign Minister. Datuk Abdullah will leave Dhaka Thursday.

Water talks

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Rahman received his Indian counterpart at the airport while Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh K. Raghunath and Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Farooq Sobhan were present.

Dixit said Bangladesh would once again take up the stewardship of the SAARC and India was eagerly looking forward to the summit here in December.

"We are looking forward to very useful discussions," the Indian Foreign Secretary said, adding "such talks are a regular feature between the two countries."

"Bangladesh is one of our most important immediate neighbours," he said and added that India's "historic and emotional" attachment in Bangladesh's emergence as an independent nation remained a factor in developing good relationship with this country.

He said the visit, the first after he assumed the responsibility of the Foreign Secretary of his country, was taking place after a successful visit by Bangladesh Prime Minister to India sometime ago.

Discussions here with his Bangladesh opposite number would follow the trend to talks set by the Prime Ministers of the two countries, he said.

Dixit, who served as Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka in the early seventies, described his visit as "nostalgic".

He served as his country's ambassador to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka before becoming the Foreign Secretary.

Dixit leaves here on August 23 for home.

Repatriation talks

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that it may be possible to set a new date for the repatriation as many refugees are willing to return home voluntarily. However, Dhaka will once again press Myanmar for involving UN agencies into the process.

At the last meeting Myanmar agreed to consider Bangladesh's proposal to let Yangon-based officials of UNDP and UNICEF to visit Arakan to see the condition prevailing there.

The refugees have arrived from Arakan during the last one year to escape a military crackdown.

Their repatriation was to

start from May 15 under a Dhaka-Yangon bilateral agreement. But it was postponed after the refugees refused to return home until human rights condition improved in military-ruled Myanmar. Since then more than 10 refugees have died in violence involving police, pro-repatriation and anti-repatriation refugees.

The Bangladesh officials who had visited some parts of Arakan reported that circumstances that forced the refugees to leave their home were now congenial for their return. But many refugees are still afraid of going back home.

Powerful quake may hit Tokyo in 10 to 20 yrs

TOKYO, Aug 21: Tokyo could be hit by a powerful earthquake in the next 10 to 20 years that would devastate one-third of the central district, according to an expert report released today, says Reuters.

The Central Disaster Prevention Council, headed by the Prime Minister, said for the first time that Tokyo and surrounding regions—home to 32.6 million people—faced the risk of a direct-hit earthquake in 10 to 20 years.

It urged the government to take new disaster prevention measures such as designing many more new evacuation areas in Tokyo's highly congested business and residential areas.

The councils said companies should receive more instruction on earthquake relief and be encouraged to set up alternate computer centres in the event of widespread damage in Tokyo.

Japan's Meteorological agency is confident of predicting an earthquake caused by plate movement off the Pacific seaboard between Tokyo and Osaka. Most experts agree, however, that there is no way to predict a direct-hit or "Chokkagata" jolt.

If a quake measuring 6 or more on the Richter Scale struck Tokyo, it would destroy about one third of all homes and buildings, the report said.

10 hurt at soccer fans clash in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Aug 21: At least ten persons were injured when rival supporters clashed over a charity match between Abahani Krira Chakra and Sirajganj Eleven at the Shahid Shamsuddin Stadium here today, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the clash ensued from the decision of a penalty shot against Sirajganj Eleven given by the referee, eight minutes before the end of the match.

Immediately after the decision, supporters of both the teams engaged in a scuffle which left ten people injured.

However, the match resumed within a few minutes, following the interference of police.

Abahani won the encounter by a solitary goal of Rehan.

ADB aid

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for the general population in the areas of environmental protection, family planning and basic skills.

The project will be executed by the Bangladesh Open University through a project implementation unit (PIU) under the overall supervision of the Secretary of the Ministry of Education.

The soft loan offered by ADB under the agreement carries one per cent service charge per annum and will be repaid in 40 years, including moratorium for 10 years.

Housewife murdered

By DMCH Correspondent

A young housewife, was murdered reportedly by her husband at a residence at north Ibrahimpur in the city Thursday night. She was 17.

Cantonment Police recovered the body of housewife China from a motor garage at Ibrahimpur Friday morning and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue for autopsy.

Police suspected that China was stabbed to death with a broken bottle.

Police said, they raided the house, but China's husband Milon, an auto-rickshaw driver, had been absconding.

A case was registered with Cantonment Police.

Village doc shot dead in Barisal

BARISAL, Aug 21: A village doctor Kalipada Roy of the Guabarua Union of Hizla thana was shot dead yesterday at about 8-30 pm by some unidentified gunmen.

According to sources, a group of people came to his residence last night and took him out by saying that he would have to attend a patient. Immediately after he came out of the door, he was gunned down with a cut-rifle, the sources said.

Police sources said that the incident may be a sequel to the village politics as Dr Kalipada played a key role in a number of 'shahish' (rural arbitration).

His body was taken to the Barisal Medical College Hospital for autopsy. A case was also filed with Hizla thana in this connection.

In another incident a minor boy Hanif (10), succumbed to injuries as he was beaten by his elder brother Munir Hossain at Roypasha Karapur Union of Kotwali thana yesterday afternoon.

Round in zoo ends up in hospital

By DMCH Correspondent

Twenty-five-year-old Shahabuddin went to visit the zoo but suddenly found himself in the paws of a leopard while trying to escape heavy rains.

The poor truck driver with serious injuries was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

At around 5.30 pm yesterday, rains disrupted curious Shahabuddin's roaming about the contained wilderness of the Mirpur Zoo, prompting him to look for a shelter. The unmindful fellow found a shelter, within the reach of the leopard.

Two DMC students injured in clash

By DMCH Correspondent

Two students of Dhaka Medical College were injured when two rival students groups clashed at Dr Fazle Rabbi Hall of the college at Bakhshi Bazar Monday morning.

The clash ensued when some students of Alya Madrasa reportedly identified as Islami Chhatra Shibir workers beat a first year (old) medical student Wahiduzzaman near the hall gate at around 9:30am yesterday.

Following the attack on the medical student, some agitated students from the hall chased the Madrasa students immediately.

When the Madrasa students fled, the agitated students caught Morshed, President of the Medical College unit of Islami Chhatra Shibir, in the hall and severely beat him. Morshed was a fourth year (old) student of the college.

Both the injured were admitted at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Premadasa survives no-confidence

COLOMBO, Aug 21: Sri Lanka's governing United National Party defeated a vote of no-confidence in Parliament Friday, overcoming its second political crisis in less than a year, reports AP.

Legislators defeated the opposition motion against the government by 60 votes, with 121 Parliament members voting for the government and 61 against it. Two members abstained, and 41 members were absent.

The vote came a day after government troops resumed an offensive against Tamil guerrillas in the northern Jaffna peninsula in an effort to gain control of the rebel-held region.

The motion accused the government of supporting private armies that killed more than 1,000 supporters of a leftist group leading a nationwide anarchist uprising against the state in 1987-'89.

New political alliance in Pakistan

KARACHI, Aug 21: Six minor opposition groups formed a new political alliance in Pakistan Thursday, a veteran politician said, reports AFP.

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan told a press conference that the group named the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), included the National People's Party of former caretaker Prime Minister Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi.

Jatoi broke links with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif early this year.

It also includes the Jamhoori Watan Party of Nawab Akbar Bugti, an influential feudal lord and former Governor of the southwestern province of Baluchistan.

Khan, who has been active in an anti-Sharif campaign together with the main opposition People's Democratic Alliance of former Premier Benazir Bhutto, said the NDA would work to oust the "dishonest and incapable leadership."

The brutal suppression of the leftist revolt helped the governing party win the 1988 presidential elections and the 1989 parliamentary elections, both of which were widely tainted, the opposition charged.

The opposition also alleged that the government of President Ranasinghe Premadasa armed Tamil Tiger rebels in 1990 during their 2-year-old war against Indian Peace Keeping Forces in Sri Lanka.

The Indians, upon the invitation of Sri Lanka, were trying to end the Tamil ethnic war but ended up fighting the Tigers when they refused to lay down their arms.

A similar no-confidence motion accusing the government of arming the Tigers was defeated last October. The government has so far denied it armed the rebels.

The United National Party has 125 seats in the 225-member Parliament.

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