

# DOWN TO EARTH Dhaka's Street Children

By A S M Nurunnabi

By 'street children' we mean the rootless, wretched children in the urban areas. They form a miserable part of the city's poor and take recourse to various means to earn a living for survival. Their multitudinous numbers include those working in markets, staying at juvenile detention centres, living at railway stations, bus terminals and launch ghats and doing various odd jobs. According to estimates of the World Health Organization (WHO), there are 100 million street children in the world, of whom 20 million live in developed countries, 40 million in Latin America, 25 to 30 million in Asia and nearly 10 million in Africa.

There are no dependable statistics as to the total number of street children in Dhaka city. But judged by their ubiquitous presence in all areas of the city, it seems that their total number may run into a few lakhs. And their number may be steadily swelling owing to economic reasons. The WHO has noted that in Bolivia they are called 'Mothers', in Cameroon 'Chicks', in Vietnam 'Children of the Dust' and in Colombia 'Bed Bugs'. In Bangladesh they are known as 'Tokat'.

As everywhere, they have a precarious existence, always in search of food and shelter. They are particularly at risk for drug and sexual abuse. They do not seem to have the least of social security.

Though quite a large number of them are found to be begging, not all of them seem to be resourceless. Most of the latter take to one form of odd job or another to keep their body and soul together. Some of the jobs they are found engaged in include carrying small loads at city bazars where they are known as 'mintis', shoe polishing at important road corners, vending a variety of wares, ranging from matchboxes to peanuts, and doing various chores in small shops, etc.

Associated with the plight of the street children is the problem of child labour. Official statistics suggest that 25 per cent of families of Bangladesh are dominated by mothers who have no alternative means but to depend on whatever earnings their children manage. Thus many of the children at early age get involved in the struggle for existence and some of them even in minor crimes. It is inevitable that in this grim struggle for existence they get undernourished and become victims of various diseases, making the prospect of their turning into useful citizens a bleak one.

Rehabilitation of the street children is admittedly a gigantic task. It is understood that no survey of the street children was ever made. The government Department of Social Welfare has tried to address

the problem, though in a small way. It has established a rehabilitation home for distressed children at Konabari under Gazipur district. Limited to a capacity for about 300 children, it had admitted a total of 754 children from 1984 to 1992, of whom 477 children had passed out with general, technical and vocational education.

Under the previous regime, a rehabilitation scheme for such children was initiated under the 'Pathakali Trust'. In this respect, according to observers, the large number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the country may also make significant contribution. Along with their many projects on health, education, environment, self-employment, etc., they may also take up projects for rehabilitation of street and underprivileged children.

The discouraging aspect of the problem is that though unfortunately concerted national effort to ameliorate the lot of the street children is lacking, the problem is compounded by the rising trend of population increase. In this perspective, it is the opinion of knowledgeable quarters that unless the population explosion is contained within a tolerable limit along with coordinated efforts made for rehabilitation of street children, no meaningful progress can be expected in the future.



Tokats rummaging through the rubbish at a City Corporation dump on the outskirts of the metropolis. —Star photo

# JS session from tomorrow

From Page 1 Col 4

However, the business advisory committee of the Jatiya Sangsad comprising representatives from different political parties in parliament will meet this morning to decide the agenda and tenure of the session.

Sources in the committee indicated that the session, contrary to media speculations, would be a brief one with about 20 sittings of the parliament members.

Meanwhile, the ruling BNP and the main opposition Awami League (AL) have separately decided to hold their respective parliamentary party meetings on Sunday morning while the Jatiya Party (JP), the second largest opposition in parliament, will hold the meeting of its parliamentary wing today.

All the parties will work out their respective strategies for the budget session in these meetings.

Khandaker Delwar Hossain, chief whip of the Jatiya Sangsad, told this correspondent Thursday that the government would place four ordinances before the House on the opening day of the budget session.

Beside these ordinances, the House would also consider four bills that were introduced in the last session.

"No major bill is likely to be introduced by the treasury bench in the budget session," said Mahub Alam Tara, one of the influential whips of the ruling party.

The House is also likely to discuss on the investigation report on the controversial Hare Road building.

Works Minister Rafiqul Islam Miah told this correspondent that he, independently of the opposition's demand, wants to submit a report on this issue before the House.

"I shall submit the report to the Speaker very soon," the minister said, adding "It is the Speaker's prerogative whether he allows it to be discussed in the House or not."

However, the budget session, apart from debates on economic issues is likely to witness hot exchanges between the opposition and the treasury benches on the question of trial of the Jamaat chief Golam Azam as a war criminal.

# DMP bans rallies

From Page 1 Col 5

The parliament goes into budget session on Sunday.

A UNB report said the DMP Commissioner has imposed a ban on rallies, processions and demonstrations around Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban and its adjoining areas from midnight tonight to ensure smooth conduct of the ensuing parliament session.

The Police Commissioner has also restricted carrying arms and explosives in the areas. The order will remain in force until the ninth session of the fifth parliament is prorogued.

The restriction will be enforced in the following areas:

From old Airport to Bangla Motor crossing of Mymensingh Road, western end of Bangla Motor Link Road to Sonargaon Road fountain crossing, eastern side of Green Road crossing point through Farmgate, from Shyamoli Cinema Hall to Dhanmondi Road No-16 (old-27) connecting point, Agargaon Link Road, from the crossing of Agargaon Link Road and Rokeya Sarani to Bijoy Sarani via Parjatan Crossing, eastern side of Indira Road to

western side of Manik Mia Avenue, restricted areas of Jatiya Sangsad and all roads and lanes within these areas.

Nirmul Committee sources said that preparations for a successful sit-in were complete.

Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, city unit convener of the committee, told The Daily Star that the action demanding the trial of Golam Azam was a non-violent one.

He claimed that several thousand people including more than 100 MPs would join the programme starting from three in the afternoon.

Supporters have been asked to throng at the Shahbagh crossing from where they would march towards the parliament to stage the sit-in.

The committee's other demands include implementation of ruling party-opposition agreements, banning of fundamentalist politics and stopping harassment of the committee's supporters.

Earlier, an alliance of 11 political parties including the Awami League extended support to the committee's Sunday sit-in.

**Clinton's approval rating slides**

WASHINGTON, May 7: President Bill Clinton's approval rating has slipped 11 points in a little more than two months, as people become disenchanted with the effectiveness of his economic plan, said a poll Thursday, reports AFP.

Fifty-six per cent of the 1,009 adults polled approved his plan in February but his approval rating slid to 45 per cent when the poll was conducted between April 29 and May 2, said the Times Mirror Centre for the People and the Press, which did the study.

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# Indian army chief orders more troop deployments on Kashmir border

JAMMU (India), May 7: Indian Army Chief Sunith Rodrigues toured forward areas on the Kashmir border with Pakistan today and ordered additional troop deployments, a defence ministry spokesman said here, reports AFP.

Rodrigues ordered army reinforcements at all strategically important and vulnerable forward areas and higher mountain passes to prevent infiltration by Muslim militants following the thaw, the spokesman said.

India says Muslim militants are trained in the Pakistan-held northern third of Kashmir. It accuses Pakistani troops of helping the militants infiltrate the Indian zone to continue a guerrilla campaign for secession.

# Ten win PANOS fellowship

By Staff Correspondent

Ten candidates have been selected for the PANOS fellowship programme on the basis of marks scored, according to a PIB press release.

The successful candidates are Inam Ahmed (The Daily Star), Lutfun Nahar Begum (Sakaer Khabar), Abdur Rahman Khan (The Telegraph), Daisy Moudud (Purbakone), Mukhlisar Rahman (Dinkal), Nasimunnahar Nini (Dinkal), Abdullah M. Hasan (The Telegraph), Nahar Parveen (ADAB), Abdul Halim Khan (Weekly Khadem) and Shamima Chowdhury (PIB).

Selected candidates have been advised to attend an orientation course to be held at the PIB from May 22 to 29.

# Wijetunga

From Page 1 Col 4

Premadasa's 22-member cabinet and promoted Industries Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to the post of new premier.

Wijetunga kept for himself the key ministries of defence and finance. He also took over the portfolios of higher education, Buddhist affairs and policy planning held by Premadasa.

Wijetunga described his philosophy of life quoting a Buddhist scripture: "I will do what I say and will not say anything I cannot do," and called for opposition support to "stamp out violence and other negative and evil forces."

He said the unanimous approval of his candidacy brought to mind a William Shakespeare quotation: "... some have greatness thrust upon them."

"I will endeavour to establish a new social order in which there will not be even a trace of arbitrariness and intolerance. I invite you to join hands with me in working for the achievement of these ideals," Wijetunga said.

In his first address to the nation today, Wijetunga said his administration was committed to continuing Premadasa's liberalisation policies but cautioned that he would not hesitate to implement changes where necessary.

"My approach will be pragmatic and not dogmatic. Where new direction is found to be in the national interest, necessary modifications or changes will be effected," Wijetunga said.

He said maintenance of discipline, law and order, and respect for human rights will receive the "considered attention and support of my government."

He said Sri Lanka looked forward to support from the international community to strengthen democracy and maintain economic stability.

"A solution must be found urgently, he said, to the 'unfortunate' conflict in the island's northeast where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is battling for a separate state for minority Tamils.

"What we have is not a Tamil issue. But a terrorism problem. The LTTE is an illegal army on our soil and we will have to disarm them," Wijetunga told reporters earlier in the day.

Asked if Colombo would make a fresh move to initiate a dialogue with the LTTE, he said, "It is for them to come and talk. We have done everything possible."

Sri Lanka police had earlier blamed the LTTE for the slaying of Premadasa but Wijetunga said investigations were still continuing.

Wijetunga's election as Sri Lanka's third executive President was greeted by table thrumping on both sides of parliament but the euphoria was somewhat drowned when a leftist firebrand demanded the government's resignation.

"The government must resign and stage election," Vasudeva Nanayakkara, the lone member of parliament from his New Equal Society Party (NSSP) demanded.



Jahanara Imam lighting a torch yesterday evening before a procession in the city to drum up support for the Nirmul Committee's sit-in programme in front of the Jatiya Sangsad Sunday. —Star photo

# Existing labour laws

From Page 1 Col 7

hardly ever used for the settlement of industrial disputes. Again Section 43 provides that "no industrial dispute shall be deemed to exist unless it has been raised in the prescribed manner by a collective bargaining agent or an employer."

However, the FIAS report points out. The prescribed manner in which the parties must act to render a dispute an industrial dispute within the meaning of the IRO, in effect, greatly reduces the scope of the provisions relating to control of industrial disputes.

Similar problems, it says, and anomalies exist with respect to conditions of association and registration of a trade union, conciliation of disputes, and the effective operation of labour courts.

The labour courts, set up under provisions of the IRO, consist of a chairman appointed by the government, and two members to advise the chairman, one representing the employers and the other representing the employees.

Whatever may be the theoretical merits of the membership system, the FIAS report notes, in practice it works to create abnormal delays as the absence of one of the members results in the day's scheduled cases being adjourned.

"Such absence of members is quite common, thus delays are built into the system over and above the usual delays which are common to litigation."

Noting that the membership system was abolished in Pakistan in 1973 and that labour courts in both Pakistan and India consist of only one person, the FIAS suggests that a similar approach can also be followed in Bangladesh.

The labour appellate tribunals, formed under the IRO, hear appeals from decisions of the labour courts. However, their jurisdiction is limited to hearing appeals from awards and sentences passed while trying offences under the IRO. Since the single member tribunals consist of persons who are or have been High Court judges, the report suggests that they should be competent

to hear appeals from all decisions, awards or sentences of the labour courts.

"Only minor amendments would be required to Section 37 of the IRO and Section 25 of the Standing Orders Act to effect this change," it notes.

Rather than enact piecemeal adjustments to correct the anomalies, the FIAS report recommends formulation of a new comprehensive labour code which could provide an integrated framework for establishing the rights and duties of the both employers and employees and also provide speedy and effective access to justice for aggrieved persons.

"The code should incorporate all the necessary special provisions for the operation of the labour courts, as well as adequately specifying their jurisdiction."

The government last year formed a national labour law commission headed by Justice Abdul Quddus Chowdhury, which also includes representatives of employees and employers, to review the existing labour laws and to recommend ways to bring about necessary changes.

The 35-member commission is expected to submit its report later this year. Four committees have been found under the commission relating to trade unions and industrial disputes, wages and terms and conditions for employment, labour administration and work environment.

The FIAS report suggests that consideration of the commission's recommendations and appropriate legislation should be introduced as early as possible.

Moreover, it adds "the recommendations should be reviewed to ensure that they adequately address the various issues and anomalies in law and practice identified above."

A joint service of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) and the World Bank, FIAS completed and presented the report to the government in November last. The study was conducted at the request of the government to identify major constraints to investment in the country.

# CPB serves notice on party MP

Staff Correspondent

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) yesterday served a notice on the party central leader Nazir Hossain, MP, to show cause within seven days why disciplinary measures would not be taken against him on charge of defaming the party.

The decision to this effect was taken on the same day at an emergency meeting of the CPB Presidium with Ajoy Roy in the chair, says a party press release.

# Boat capsized

From Page 1 Col 8

Abul Hossain, 35, Shahjahan Mia, 13, Layek Mia, 50, Bakki, 60, and Wahid Mia, 30. The body of another victim aged about 35 could not be identified.

They were all inhabitants of village Rowadia in Bhairab thana of Kishoreganj district.

A Jamalpur report adds: Seven people, including three children, were missing after a mechanised boat capsized in the river Jamuna today.

Witnesses said the Kazipur-bound boat with 33 passengers overturned in midstream, during a storm, seven kilometre from Kazipur. Of the passengers, 26 swam ashore.

All the missing people were from Kazipur thana of Sirajganj district.

# Sharif

From Page 1 Col 8

policies to suit his "personal business interests."

No immediate reaction was available from the former Premier who earlier said his track record was clean and rejected the investigation panel as a committee of "corrupt and dishonest people."

Sarrafraz said the case would be sent to the Law Ministry which would frame charges for a court trial of the deposed premier.

Earlier Mazari told reporters in Sharif's home city of Lahore today that his government would look into "illegals" of the previous rulers and take action against those found guilty.

But the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) quoted Mazari as saying that it was not possible to go into the depths of every case in the interim government's three months tenure.

President Ghulam Ishaq Khan named Mazari as caretaker Premier until July 14 elections after sacking Sharif on April 18 because of moves he made to trim the president's sweeping powers.

Sharif has challenged his dismissal in the Supreme Court of Pakistan and hearing of his petition would resume Saturday. He has also launched a mass mobilisation campaign against presidential action.

# Storm hits Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, May 7: At least 20 people were injured and more than 100 thatched houses of several thanas of the district were damaged during a cyclonic storm today (Friday), reports UNB.

# The Midnight File

## Non-racial polls in South Africa within 12 months

JOHANNESBURG, May 7: South Africa's first non-racial elections will take place within 12 months if the political transition proceeds smoothly, negotiators agreed at multi-party talks here today. All but two of the 26 groups from across the political spectrum participating in the talks signed a carefully-worded declaration of intentions stating that an exact date for an election, to take place "not before the end of April 1994," should be set by negotiators within the next four weeks, reports AFP.

## Manipur police chief sacked

NEW DELHI, May 7: The Manipur state government today blamed its police chief for the deaths of 115 people in four days of Hindu-Muslim rioting and removed him from post, national radio said. The Chief Minister of the remote north-eastern state ordered state police chief A V Liddle to hand over authority to his deputy and take leave in connection with the violence in three of the state's eight districts. "This step has been taken in view of the handling by the police of the rioting in the state," said Chief Minister R K Dorendra Singh, reports AFP.

# SKOP: Legal action

From Page 1 Col 7

Meanwhile, Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan is scheduled to meet the Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) leaders at the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training at Kakrail in the city at five this afternoon.

The Personal Assistant of the minister issued a letter to this effect to the SKOP yesterday. The SKOP coordinator Dr Wajedul Islam confirmed the letter and said he had received the invitation at 1 pm yesterday.

Dr Wajed also confirmed the SKOP's participation in the proposed meeting, expected to discuss, among other issues, the 72-hour nationwide strike May 11-13 and the labour bodies' demands.

The SKOP and the combine of jute-textile-cotton-sugar-BSEC workers' unions simultaneously called the three-day shutdown to press the government for implementing the accords it had earlier signed regarding the labour demands.

Commenting on the prospects of their talks with the minister, Dr Wajed said the discussion must concentrate on the implementation of the signed agreements.

"We are determined to go for the shutdown unless the government honours the accords," he added.

Patkal Sramik Karmachari Sangram Parishad leader Abdul Basheer denied receiving any invitation from the government until yesterday evening.

"We are going ahead with our plans for the 72-hour strike," he told this correspondent.

The jute sector leader also dismissed fresh talks with the authorities saying, the only option for the government is to fulfil the demands it had accepted earlier.

Both the SKOP and the combine of the jute-textile and other trade union federations have already completed their countrywide campaign for the shutdown. The bodies will hold rallies in the city and its suburbs in the next three days, starting today, sources said.

The strike organisers have, meantime, won full support of the left-leaning Five-Party combine, the four-party Patriotic Democratic Front (PDF) and other smaller parties.

Although their labour fronts are included among the strike organisers, the biggest opposition Awami League and the Jatiya Party are yet to commit their support to the strike.

The SKOP is likely to meet the AL chief and leader of the Opposition in parliament Sheikh Hasina either today or tomorrow in a bid to seek her party's support for the programme, SKOP coordinator Dr Wajed said last night.

Contradicting suggestions that the AL was unwilling to back the strike, Dr Wajed explained: "The AL's support to our demands implies its backing of our action programme, too."

The SKOP leaders met at the Trade Union Centre office at Topkhana last night to discuss their preparations for the strike.

## SKOP refutes BEA

Meanwhile, the SKOP, in a press release yesterday, strongly condemned the Bangladesh Employers' Association (BEA) statement issued to the press Tuesday which called upon the political parties not to support the planned shutdown.

"Such a call is opposed to democratic norms and values," the SKOP statement said, and accused the "lumpen owners' class" of attempting to foil the strike. "Their (owners') utterances are exacerbating the situation in the country's industrial sector," the SKOP remarked.

The Samajtantrik Sramik Front, a SKOP component, at a rally in the city yesterday, asked the government to implement the signed accords or face an oust-the-government movement.

Held in front of the National Press Club, the rally was addressed by Golam Mahmud, Abdur Razzak and others.

## Tagore

From Page 1 Col 8

deast live the opening function at 7:30 pm.

Bangladesh Television and various socio-cultural organisations have also planned programmes to mark the occasion.

Celebrations will also be held in Shilaidah and Kuthibari where the poet lived and created some of his best-known works.

In a message, President Abdur Rahman Biswas paid tributes to the memory of the great poet and said the nation will ever remember his contribution in different fields of literature.

The songs, poems and other literary works of the poet are our precious treasure, he said, adding that his contribution to Bangla language and culture would undoubtedly remain a source of inspiration for us all.

During the War of Liberation, he said, the people of this country were inspired by the songs and poems of Tagore.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, in a message, paid tributes to the Nobel laureate and hoped that the messages contained in the great works of Tagore would be successfully reflected in our work and thoughts.

The vast and varied literary works of the poet had helped establish Bangla literature in the world arena, she said.

The observance of the birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore at the national level in the last year of the Bangla fourteenth century bears special significance, she added.

Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina said that the best way to pay tribute to poet Rabindranath Tagore was to resist alien culture, and restore the Bengali ideals and the spirits of the Liberation War in national life.

In a message on the occasion, Hasina said that Tagore's works reflect the social condition, and hopes and aspirations of the Bengali people.

## Indian Gen

From Page 1 Col 3

The General had completed an inspection of the Indian army training contingent in Bhutan and was to fly to Thimphu to meet the Bhutan Army Chief and the King before flying home.

The others killed in the early today crash were identified as Colonel M A Ahmed, the General's military assistant, Colonel Darshan Singh, Havildar Ghanshyam Singh and the four crew members.

The helicopter was being piloted by Squadron Leader, Sahu of the Indian Air Force.

A spokesman for the Bhutan Embassy here confirmed news of the crash but said the cause was not known. The Indian government ordered a court of inquiry to investigate the cause, the Defence Ministry said.

Mahmood, who is survived by two sons and a daughter, was a recipient of the Uttam Yudh Seva medal for 'devotion to duty of the most exceptional order.'

Commissioned into the army's artillery regiment in January 1957, he won the medal for his services in the Indian military fight against Shri Lankan Tamil separatist guerrillas in 1987-90.

A graduate of the Defence Services Staff College of India, he became chief of the Eastern Army Command in October, 1992 after holding several important assignments at Army Headquarters here.

## Storm hits Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, May 7: At least 20 people were injured and more than 100 thatched houses of several thanas of the district were damaged during a cyclonic storm today (Friday), reports UNB.