

# DOWN TO EARTH

## City's Floating Population

By A S M Nurunnabi

No survey seems to have been made of the floating population of the Dhaka city. It is, however, an educated guess that not less than one third of the urban population constitutes the floating sections of the urban population who live in miserable, unhygienic and sometimes inhuman conditions in squatter camps, on pavements, parks, near open sewers and in the thousands of slums that have sprung up in the city.

How were these people reduced to such a position? Most of them had their roots in the villages, some of them had lost their lands due to river erosion or were forced to float for economic reasons. When during off season, work is in short supply in the villages, some of them move to the towns. There are also other causative factors: natural calamities and exploitation by money lenders bring hordes of poor, illiterate villagers to urban areas with the hope of finding any job that may assure their survival.

Once the landless peasants land in the city, they either erect makeshift shacks which gradually grow into slums or find shelter in any existing slum or basti on payment of 'rent' to local tout for a shack which is just an impoverished apology of a shelter. The 'rent'-such dwellers pay does not guarantee their right of possession over the shacks and thus the slum dwellers live in constant fear of eviction which may be sudden. In the city, there are slums of various descriptions such as semi slums, quarter slums, mini slums, etc. which grow up on vacant public lands, along railway tracks, around bazars — in fact on every vacant space allowing undisturbed occupation for sometime. They proliferate by the day, because of the worsening of the poverty situation of the rural and urban poor.

The floating millions living in slums are poised on the edge of survival and constantly hounded by starvation, disease and death and the fear of eviction. They are not tax payers, nor are they among voters. Therefore, politically they do not exist. Nobody's sensibilities seem to be affected by their continuing plight as they cling to life in their struggle for survival. But humanly and nationally, they very much do exist and they constitute a vital segment of the people. And accordingly, on altruistic and humanitarian grounds, the cause of their rehabilitation merits serious and urgent consideration.

It has been reported by the World Bank that for most of the city dwellers of limited means, finding any kind of residential arrangement will remain a chimera by the turn of the century. In this context, the fate of the floating sections of the people who are virtual destitute seems to offer no hope for change.

The economic rehabilitation of the floating people under a balanced national policy should be among the administration's foremost priorities. Quite recently, in December 1993, the National Housing Policy was approved by the Cabinet. This policy was reportedly formulated by the government, following consultations with experts on housing and urban planning and keeping relevant provisions of the Constitution and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in mind. The policy includes provisions stipulating that forcible relocation or displacement of slum dwellers must be avoided as far as possible. It also provides for renovation and betterment of occupancy rights wherever possible.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 43/181 decided that the main focus of global strategy for shelter by year 2000 should be on improving the situation of the disadvantaged and the poor. It adds that shelter and development are mutually supportive and policies must be formulated keeping the link in mind.

The National Housing Policy is yet to be implemented. Meanwhile, little or nothing substantial appears to have been done. As a result, slums in one form or another keep coming up which the elitist pockets of the city may not pretend to see. But none should take it into his head that bulldozing the slum dwellers out will itself solve the problem. Recent cases of eviction of slum dwellers including those at Kamalapur, Agargaon and Kalyanpur show that the evictees are seldom given enough time to vacate the land they occupy nor are they given any sufficient advance notice.

According to observers, the slum dwellers may not have the right to live on the land they occupy. They, however, have the constitutional right to live. This right cannot be exercised without livelihood, in search of which they flock to the city. Thus, if a person is deprived of livelihood, i.e., his right to live, it is felt that, by being forced to vacate his slum, his whole existence may be thrown into jeopardy. It is, therefore, of overriding importance that the problems of the floating people should be treated more as part of poverty alleviation and urban environmental protection and not as a fringe issue to be given a casual and palliative treatment.



Palestinians carrying the bodies of worshippers to their burial place in Abu Tar, east Jerusalem, yesterday, after some Jewish settlers from Kiyat Arba shot at hundreds of Palestinians praying inside a mosque in Hebron. — AFP photo

## 53 Palestinians massacred

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In ensuing confrontations, troops shot dead four Palestinians in Hebron, a 16-year-old in Nablus, and another man in the Bethlehem area. About 50 were reported wounded in the Gaza Strip.

In Jerusalem's old city, tensions ran high as hundreds of Muslims lobbed rocks at police and soldiers. Soldiers repented with teargas, some 80,000 turned out to pray at Al Aqsa Mosque on Temple Mount.

PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat called on the UN 'to protect our people' and warned the massacre would have 'very serious fallout... at all levels.'

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin condemned the 'odious massacre' and called an emergency cabinet session later today. He urged all sides 'to show restraint and not to become involved in provocative acts.'

An anonymous telephone caller to AFP in Jerusalem claimed responsibility for the killing in the name of an unknown group of Jewish extremists, the 'zealots of the god of Israel.'

He said the massacre was to avenge the December 6 shooting by Islamic fundamentalists of an Israeli settler and his son, Mordechai and Shalom Lapid, in Hebron.

The army announced that 'significant' reinforcements were being sent in to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which was sealed off. A full investigation would be held.

Heavy clashes erupted at Al Ahli and soldiers shot into the crowd packed into the compound, apparently in a bid to disperse them, witnesses said.

The army imposed a curfew on Hebron and closed off the area of the tomb, which is crowded every morning.

Meanwhile, the PLO said between 20 and 30 settlers took part in the massacre of Palestinians in a Hebron mosque today and that the death toll had risen to 63 with 270 wounded.

PLO spokesman Yasser Abed-Rabbo told a press conference in Tunis the settlers, from the Kiyat Arba settlement, were led by a captain from the Israeli army.

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali sharply condemned the Hebron massacre of 53 Palestinians today and called on Israel to prevent Jewish settlers from committing other criminal acts.

Boutros-Ghali, in an official statement released in New York, expressed deep concern over the attack in the West Bank town of Hebron and the effect it might have on the Middle East peace process.

## Rice prices go up in city

By Staff Correspondent

Although wholesalers say there is adequate supply of rice in the city markets, price of rice has gone up sharply in the last few weeks.

At the retailers' market, the coarse rice IRRI now sells at Tk 12.50 per kg. Only a month ago it was sold at Tk 10 per kg. The Pajam rice now sells at Tk 14.50, Najirshail at Tk 15 per kg both registering a rise of Tk 1-2 per kg.

Eid-ul-Fitr's common menu — plau — will be costlier as its price had already gone up to Tk 35 per kg from Tk 32.

## Mahfuz

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members of the preparatory committee of the forthcoming council of the Central Command.

Mahfuz was the convener of the Central Command Council in 1976 and was later elected twice the Chairman of the supreme body of the freedom fighters.

Mahfuzur Rahman left behind his wife, two daughters, a host of relatives, fellow freedom fighters and well wishers to mourn his death.



BSS adds: Mahfuz left invaluable contributions in the mass upsurge for the fall of autocratic regime in 1990. Later he was made chairman of the Central Command Council of the sangsad and played a very significant role for the unification of two rival groups of the MuktiJoddha Sangsad.

Mahfuz went to Mymensingh last Thursday to attend the 'chehnum' of one his fellow freedom fighters and convener of the Mymensingh district command of the sangsad. Suddenly he fell ill and was attacked with haemorrhage. He was rushed to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where he breathed his last at 5-00 am yesterday.

**Abdur Rahman Biswas**

Meanwhile President Abdur Rahman Biswas expressed his deep shock at the death of Mahfuzur Rahman.

In a condolence message, President Biswas said that Mahfuz was a veteran freedom fighter and a patriot.

President said that the contribution of Mahfuzur Rahman towards achieving independence of the country would ever be remembered by the nation.

**Doctors in Barisal call off strike**

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Feb 25: Doctors in Barisal have called off their indefinite strike for a week from today, following assurance by the Barisal Bar Association of action against those responsible for the physical assault on Dr Sajal Banerjee last Wednesday.

This decision was taken at a meeting of the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Barisal unit, Medical College Teachers' Association, Inter-nee Doctors Association and students organisations held here this morning at the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College.

The meeting, however, announced a fresh action programme for the current week. The programme includes wearing of black badges on February 26 and 27, two hours work stoppage from February 28 to March 1, three hours on March 2 and four hours work stoppage on March 3.

Medical students are expected to attend classes from tomorrow but the doctors have decided not to attend their private chambers demanding immediate arrest of the accused persons.

**Khaleda Zia**

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed her deep grief at the death of Sheikh Mahfuzur Rahman.

In a condolence message the Prime Minister said the nation would remember the contribution of Mahfuz in the country's Liberation War.

Begum Zia recalled the role of Mahfuz in organising the freedom fighters to involve themselves in the nation-building activities after the country's independence.

**Sheikh Hasina**

Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Sheikh Hasina also expressed her deep shock at the death of Mahfuzur Rahman.

In a message of condolence she prayed for the peace of the departed soul and expressed sympathy with the members of the bereaved family.

# The Midnight File

## 600 Sikh police commandos to be deployed in Assam

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Some 600 Sikh police commandos from the Indian state of Punjab are to be deployed in the far-eastern state of Assam to stamp out a separatist campaign by leftist guerrillas, officials said today. Punjab police chief Kanwar Pal Singh, who is widely credited with putting down Sikh separatism in Punjab, will lead the commandos who will remain in Assam for three months, the Press Trust of India reported, says AFP.

## US expels Russian diplomat

WASHINGTON, Feb 25: The United States is to expel today a Russian diplomat they claimed was involved with American Aldrich Ames, arrested earlier this week and accused of being a Russian mole in the CIA, a White House official said. The United States decided to expel the diplomat after Russia refused to withdraw him, reports AFP.

## Moscow may free coup leaders from today

MOSCOW, Feb 25: Leaders of the October 1993 uprising in Moscow can be freed from Saturday following publication in official media of parliament's decision to amnesty them, Interfax news agency said today, reports AFP.

Interfax, quoting Duma Speaker Ivan Rybkin, said the amnesty resolution would be published Saturday by the government daily *Rossiskaya Gazeta*.

Under prevalent interpretations of Russian law, that publication automatically brings the resolution into force.

The amnesty, approved by the Duma Wednesday, applies to former parliament Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov and Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi, both accused of leading the October revolt.

## Businessman robbed in city

By Staff Correspondent

A businessman was robbed in the city's Rankin Street area late Thursday night when he was returning home from his workplace.

Muggers snatched Tk 10,000, a gold chain and a wristwatch from Mohammad Bahauddin Babul, an owner of a printing press, at gunpoint around 12:30 at night.

Five muggers riding on a white private car allegedly waylaid Babul who was on a rickshaw near the Bhaskar Primary School.

## Chinese FM's wife visits Mahila Sangstha office

Wife of the visiting Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Zhong Hanqiong visited the office of the Jatiya Mahila Sangstha in Dhaka yesterday, reports BSS.

On arrival at the office Mrs Zhong was received by the chairperson of the Sangstha, Selima Rahman MP.

She visited different training components of the Sangstha including computer, pottery, adult literacy, *naksh-ikatha* and sewing sections and appreciated the efforts of the Sangstha for the promotion of the women in Bangladesh.

She also laid emphasis on exchanging ideas and technologies between Bangladesh and China for the development of the women community of the two countries.

Selima Rahman MP apprised Zhong that the main objective of the Sangstha is to make the country's womenfolk self-reliant through training and creating opportunities of self-employment for them.

Executive members of the Sangstha including its vice-chairperson Dr Shaheeda Rafiq and wife of Chinese Ambassador Zhang Zujiang were present.

## Two terrorists held

By Staff Correspondent

Police caught two alleged terrorists riding an auto-rickshaw after half an hour chase and trading of gunshots in the city's Agargaon area around noon yesterday.

During the chase, two terrorists hurled crackers and shot at police who returned the fire.

Police were able to halt the auto-rickshaw near the Agriculture College at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and arrested them.

Police recovered a revolver, knives and crackers from the arrested — Shaheen, 25, and Shajahan, 35.

They are likely to be produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate today.

## Hasina

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Ahmedul Kabir attended the iftar.

Hasina talked to the guests and exchanged greetings with them.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, who was also invited to attend the iftar, did not turn up.

Party leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Abdul Mannan, Abdul Momin, Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, Mohiuddin Ahmed, Zillur Rahman, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofael Ahmed, Abdur Sagdeq, Dr Qadri, Abdul Jalil, Begum Matia Chowdhury, Rahmat Ali, Obaidul Qader, Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin and Abdul Mannan were also present.

## WB team

From Page 1 Col 3

Bangladeshis claim for more aid in the next Aid Consortium meeting. Although the government is working out an ADP of over 100 billion takas for the coming fiscal year, donors are not convinced that anything over 90 billion takas would be achievable. Given this limit on Bangladeshis absorption of aid, the donors will argue against any significant increase in project aid disbursement.

According to a separate report Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman will visit Washington in the second week of March to hold pre-Aid Consortium consultation with the World Bank and the IMF. On his way to Washington the Finance Minister will visit Ottawa to meet his Canadian counterpart. Additional Secretary of ERD Shahidul Alam will accompany the Finance Minister.

## Pakistan closes embassy in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, Feb 25: Pakistan said Friday it had temporarily closed its embassy in Afghanistan in the wake of a mob attack that damaged the building and destroyed communications equipment, reports AP.

In another development, unidentified Afghans fired at least two rockets at Pakistani guards patrolling the Torkham border gate that separates the countries near the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar. The Pakistani guards returned fire, but there were no serious injuries in Thursday's shooting, Pakistani officials said.

The shooting was the latest in a series of incidents that have heightened tensions between the two Asian nations.

## RU admission tests begin today

From RU Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Feb 25: Some 32,063 applicants will sit for the admission test of the first year honours course for the session of 1993-94 tomorrow against 3180 seats for 33 subjects in six faculties of the Rajshahi University.

The admission tests for the newly launched Computer Science and Library Science departments will also begin tomorrow.

The admission tests will end on March 3.

According to the schedule, the admission test of the Arts Faculty will be held on February 26, Social Science on February 27, Law on February 28, Life and Earth Science March 1, Commerce on March 2 and Science Faculty on March 3.

All classes of the university will remain closed during the admission tests.

## Salam Talukder

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Talukder told The Daily Star over telephone.

He said, the news of the latest AL move reminds him of the late 80s when the anti-autocracy movement was picking up. The BNP, he said, had proposed at that time to forge a common platform of all parties, including the Jamaat, but the AL had refused to sit with that party.

The AL still dubbed Jamaat 'razakar' and demands Golam Azam's trial but how can they seek help from the Jamaat to boost the opposition strength, he questioned.

'I don't know how they will explain this move as they had always accused us of associating with Jamaat in the politics, Salam Talukder said.

'The AL's association with the autocratic Jatiya Party had earlier been proved through different programmes and now they were forming a three-party alliance taking the Jamaat with them,' the BNP Secretary General added.

## Marketing of radiated fertiliser alleged

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Krishak Samity in a statement yesterday alleged that some unscrupulous businessmen were marketing in different parts of the country 'radiated' fertiliser. They also alleged sale of fertiliser mixed with mineral oil, low-quality crop seeds and insecticides harmful to the environment.

The statement was issued by Abdul Matin and Khandakar Ali Abbas, president and general secretary of the samity respectively.

They said the ignorant farmers were using the harmful fertiliser and insecticides destroying fertility of arable lands.

To substantiate their claim, the peasant leaders said, they had collected after proper examination the samples of such harmful fertiliser.

They demanded that the government immediately ban the marketing of the 'radiated' fertiliser.

## BNP polls

From Page 1 Col 4

present along with some city leaders, including the mayoral candidates. The meeting adjourned indefinitely.

The leaders identified some reform programmes, organisational weaknesses and lack of coordination between mayoral and commissioner candidates as the major causes of failure in Dhaka and Chittagong.

'No new point came up for discussion. It has already been reported in your newspaper,' one standing committee leader said without elaborating.

According to sources, all the speakers emphasised on reactivating the organisation.

'It is too early to comment about what the committee is going to decide,' the BNP central leaders said 'but we will take concrete decisions at the end of the meeting.'

## One killed in Sylhet clash

From Our Correspondent

SYLHET, Feb 25: One person was killed and ten others injured in a clash between two rival groups of villagers near Maljgaon railway station this afternoon.

The incident occurred at about 12:30 pm over the possession of a plot of land and a shop near Maljgaon railway station.

Both the groups used lethal weapons during the clash. The dead was identified as Abdul Khaleque, 60. Seven critically injured had been admitted to the Fenchunganj thana health complex.

A police contingent has been deployed in the area.

## Talks with Yangon begin today

The 16th round of senior official level meeting between Bangladesh and Myanmar begins today in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine (Arakan) state, reports UNB.

Officials said the three-day meeting would discuss *modus operandi* for accelerating the on-going repatriation of the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

It will also discuss measures to check smuggling and other transborder crimes.

Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Omar Faruque will lead the Bangladesh team at the talks and Immigration Director General of Myanmar Maung Aung will lead his country's side.

Of a quarter million Myanmar Muslims, who fled to Bangladesh in early 1991, over 55,000 have so far returned to their homeland voluntarily.

## Chinese FM visits Buriganga bridge

Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Qien Qichen visited the Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge over the river Buriganga yesterday afternoon. On his arrival at the bridge, the Chinese Vice-Premier was received by Communications Secretary Rezaul Hayat. Officials concerned of the Communications Ministry briefed him about the bridge which had been built with the Chinese assistance, reports UNB.

## C&F rates

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with the C&F agents still exists, 'a high official of the BCIC said, "but now they want increased rates before the expiry of the earlier contract."

The sources said, with the new commission rates, cotton and sugar imports will be costlier by a wide margin. Earlier, the C&F agents were charging 35 paise per bale of cotton. For seven thousand bales of cotton, the importers had to pay Tk 2450 as the C&F commission. But now when the commission will be charged on value at 0.25 per cent, the same cotton worth Tk 10 crore will need Tk 2.5 lakh as commission.

The exports will also become costlier as the agents have similarly enhanced their rates on the export bills. The loading of chartered vessels with urea for export is being delayed as the shipping documents are not being processed.

'For exports, the commission charges had been increased by more than ten times,' source added.

## 10 hurt in Cox's Bazar fire

COX'S BAZAR, Feb 25: Ten people were injured and 20 houses gutted in a fire in the town today. Fire Brigade sources said, reports UNB.

The blaze that originated from the oven of a house at Peshkarpara in the town engulfed the neighbouring houses and burned into ashes valuable worth about Tk 40 lakh.

Firemen rushed to the spot and put the fire out after fighting for half an hour.

## Muslims, Croats agree to swap 1000 prisoners

SARAJEVO, Feb 25: Bosnian Muslims and Croatian forces fighting in the southern town of Mostar have agreed to swap 1000 prisoners from each side. Radio Sarajevo reported today hours before a nationwide ceasefire between the two sides was due to take effect, reports AFP.

Quoting sources in the mainly Muslim Bosnian army, the radio said the agreement was reached in Medjugorje in southern Bosnia at the Spanish base there that is the center in the region for UN operations.

The Generals of Bosnian's warring Croat and Muslim factions met in Kiseljak, 35 kms (15 miles) west of Sarajevo, as the ceasefire between their forces began today, UN spokesman Dutch Major Rob Annink said.

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