

DOWN TO EARTH

Paucity of Public Libraries and Bookshops

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.

Nowadays we seem to have forgotten the important role played by books in the acquisition of knowledge. The situation has come to such a pass that we seem to regard books as a dispensable item in the over-all needs of our society. Sometimes we don't hesitate to treat collection or purchase of books as sheer waste of money.

This largely individual character trait extends to the collective sphere in the case of public libraries. So much is the importance of the role of public libraries in promoting and enriching the intellectual life of a people that a public library is called a people's university.

In all developed countries, public libraries occupy a high place in the educational system. There was a time when public libraries in some form or other functioned under unofficial patronage. Most of them in the city have since become extinct owing to lack of patronage from philanthropists, inadequate grants-in-aid from government sources and also due to gradual decline in the reading habits of the people. All over the country, there are reportedly 369 non-government public libraries. Of them, the affiliated ones get a total grant-in-aid amounting to a poor amount of Tk 58 lakh. In this big city of seven million people, there are only 13 non-government public libraries.

Public libraries under government auspices had their origin more than 30 years ago. But the progress in this field in the city has been tardy. In the city, we have only three public libraries under government, viz, the Central Public

Library with its branches at Mohammadpur and Armanitola. There are some other libraries of institutions to which members of the public have restricted access.

In the whole country, there are 66 public libraries under government management with a total budget allocation of only Tk 3 crore 80 lakh. In the opinion of observers, the inadequate budget allocation hardly helps in the expansion of library services.

With the passage of time, we have seen progress in many fields. Towns and cities have developed, industrial and commercial activities have expanded. The only exception to the trend of growth seems to affect the book business.

In the process of urban development, government gives due thought to the establishment of infrastructural facilities like road network, water supply, bazars, parks, schools, etc. But in this process of development, the need for selection of sites for public libraries is normally neglected. When consequently new neighbourhoods grow up in such areas, the process of growth in the number of shops, hotels, restaurants, and other commercial establishments goes apace. But nobody cares for the need of a public library for the community residing in those neighbourhoods.

When television first made its appearance in this country, many harboured the apprehension that the role of books as a learning vehicle might suffer a setback. But such apprehension has actually proved to be baseless. Television with its present-day world-wide network has brought the world to our doorstep. This has encouraged our interest in the outside world and sharpened our hunger for knowledge. This need can be adequately attended to if provision for library service can be turned into a social movement. We have only seen seasonal burst of interest

in books during 'book fairs' on specific occasions. There is need for channeling and organising this periodic interest as a permanent feature of our social milieu.

Keeping this need in view, observers make certain suggestions to give a boost to the library movement and reading habits. Just as government has set up industrial bank, Krishi Bank, Grameen Bank for development in their respective fields, government may similarly consider setting up of book banks. These banks may provide loans on easy terms and low rates of interest to writers, publishers and owners of bookshops. This measure may create a positive impact in the development of book business. Even unemployed educated youths may then take interest in setting up book shops or publication business. The loans in their interest to repay the loans may, on their own initiatives, take up promotional activities for expansion of book business. Just as video shops have come up in every neighbourhood of the city, it is felt that there is scope for enterprising persons to set up attractive bookshops in such areas where there is a considerable concentration of educated residents.

At present, we have bookshops in some selected areas in the city. Expansion of this trade to other areas may work as a positive step in encouraging reading habits of the people.

Side by side with encouraging reading habits of the people, attention need be paid to the expansion of the activities of the public libraries both under the government and private sector. In these days of rising trend of prices of books, a good number of interested readers turn to public libraries to satisfy their reading needs. From this aspect, a properly equipped public library is a blessing for a community.

European teams & stars

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given in December. Klinsmann and Hagi also are strong contenders.

Hagi's creativity has been even more impressive than his finishing touch. He was expected to star in the 1990 World Cup, but struggled even as Romania made the second round.

He's making up for it here, and Romania looks strong enough to actually in the title.

"This is what any player tries to do," Hagi said. "When everyone on the team is playing up to their abilities, we can win many games."

Klinsmann practically carried Germany through its first four games. The team's usual precision with the ball has been missing, but Klinsmann has not — with five goals, he leads all players still in the tournament.

"When the spotlight was on me to score, I was able to do so," he said. "But no one can decide any game, especially in the World Cup."

Baggio also shunts aside the

attention paid to the guys who fill the nets.

"All players have equal duties and merits, and share the reward and sometimes the blame," he said. "Forwards make the most visible moves, they score goals. But the goalkeeper and defenders are more decisive, sometimes."

Among the goalkeepers who have shined in the World Cup are Borislav Mihaylov, who led Bulgaria past Mexico in a penalty-kick shootout; Andoni Zubizarreta of Spain, whose work against Switzerland in the second round probably was the best by any goalkeeper so far; and Luca Marchegiani of Italy, a backup thrust onto the field when Gianluca Pagliuca was suspended in the opening round.

"It was an enormous, sudden emotion," Marchegiani said. "Because I was watching the game as a spectator and I was not ready psychologically to become a protagonist in a few seconds time."

Yet he's allowed only two goals in more than two games. Impressive defenders thus far have included Leonardo of Brazil, who won't play again after receiving a four-game suspension for elbowing American Tab Ramos in the second round; Miodrag Belodedici of Romania; Alessandro Costacurta of Italy; and Sweden's Roger Ljung.

But as Klinsmann and Baggio and Romario and Hagi know the burden of responsibility for the team's achievements is likely to be theirs.

Floods, wildfires ravage USA

WASHINGTON, July 18: Heavy rains hung over the flooded southeastern United States Thursday, bringing the death toll in Georgia to 16, while in the west firefighters battled wildfires in nine states, reports AFP.

Rain left over from tropical storm Alberto pounded Georgia and Alabama and appeared unlikely to move on in the next few days, forecasters said. The storm swept in from the Gulf of Mexico and first hit the US mainland, Florida, on Sunday.

Flooding in Georgia has killed at least 16 people since Monday. Four people were reported missing as flood waters covered tens of thousands of hectares of farmland.

More than 300,000 people statewide were without safe drinking water for the second straight day after flooding knocked out water treatment plants.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd., 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA.

SAARC ministers' meet tomorrow

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Finance or planning ministries of the SAARC countries have already held two rounds of discussions and are to sit again today for finalising the agenda.

The SAARC ministers are also likely to discuss the progress made regarding the sensitive South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA). Although discussions on SAPTA are not likely to feature in the official agenda, the participating ministers and officials are expected to compare notes of the progress made in that direction.

The possibility of setting up a South Asian Fund may also be discussed.

A joint declaration, expected at the end of the two-day meet, is likely to touch on new areas of regional cooperation in line with the proposals adopted at the seventh SAARC summit in Dhaka last year.

The attending ministers are also scheduled to visit a number of poverty alleviation projects run by Bangladeshi NGOs, including those of BRAC and the Grameen Bank.

Incidentally, Bangladesh's 15-member official delegation to the conference includes three representatives from the NGOs. They are Khaled Shams from the Grameen Bank, Faruk A Chowdhury from BRAC and Khushi Kabir from ADAB.

The Bangladesh delegation, which will be headed by Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, will include State Minister for Planning, Dr A Moyeen Khan, Finance Secretary, Nasimuddin Ahmed, ERD Secretary Luthfullah Majid, Foreign Secretary, Mofleh R Osmany, Dr Harunur Rashid, Secretary, Planning, Dr Tawfik-e-Elahi-Chowdhury, Secretary, Statistics Division and Dr Kamal Siddiqui, Secretary to the Prime Minister.

It also includes Dr Masood Ali, chairman, National Task Force on Poverty Alleviation, Barrister A K M Morshed, Chairman of the BIDS, Dr Abu Abdullah of the BIDS and Dr Ashfaqur Rahman, Director General, SAARC in the Foreign Ministry.

Bangladesh's progress in poverty alleviation is expected to receive substantial attention at the conference since considerable efforts are being made by Dhaka in the direction of poverty alleviation.

The five-member Indian team will be led by Finance Minister Manmohan Singh. It also includes the Secretary to the PM's Office.

Bhutan's three-member delegation will be headed by Lyonpo C Dorji, who is the Planning Minister of his country.

The Maldives team will be led by Dr Abdul Sattar Yusuf, Deputy Minister of Planning.

Nepal will be represented by a three-member team led by Surendra Prasad Chaudhary, Minister of State for Commerce and Civil Supplies.

The Sri Lankan team is likely to be headed by the Finance Secretary of the country. The minister may not be able to come because of impending elections in that country.

The five-member Pakistani delegation is to be headed by V A Jaffery, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on

North Yemen pledges to end hostilities

UNITED NATIONS, July 8: Yemen's victorious northern government has pledged to the United Nations to end all hostilities and seek a national dialogue following a 10-week civil war, reports AFP.

The pledge from the Sanaa authorities was made in a letter to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali which was handed over Thursday evening by Yemen's Minister of Planning and Development Abdel Karim al-Iryani.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh's government made five pledges.

— The immediate cessation of all military action in compliance with Security Council resolutions 924 and 931.

— The start of relief operations in and around Aden.

— Its decision to declare a full and comprehensive amnesty and its readiness to compensate all losses of life and property caused by the war.

— Respect for democracy, political pluralism, freedom of speech, freedom of the press and human rights.

— Commitment to the resumption of the national dialogue in the framework of constitutional legitimacy.

The Yemenis also said it was determined to cooperate fully with other countries in the Middle East region "on the basis of mutual respect for territorial integrity and non-intervention in domestic affairs."

"The Secretary General stressed the importance of the international community attaches to the full and immediate implementation of the commitments made in the letter," a spokesman for Boutros-Ghali said.

"He expressed his hope that no effort would be spared in order to restore normalcy to the whole Yemen and to promote peace and prosperity for its people."

AP adds: Victorious in its civil war, Northern Yemen late Thursday offered amnesty to Southern soldiers and invited the United Nations to monitor democracy and human rights in the country.

Northern soldiers seized the secessionist stronghold of Aden earlier Thursday and proclaimed victory and an end to two months of fighting. The leaders of the revolt reportedly fled to neighbouring Oman.

"There will be a general amnesty and there will be compensation for property lost regardless of the side people were on," said Abdel Karim al-Iryani, a key Northern official.

He spoke late Thursday after delivering a letter to UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali.

Israel-Jordan meet soon

TEL AVIV, July 8: The Israeli and Jordanian foreign ministers will hold a meeting soon in the Middle East attended by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said here Thursday, reports AFP.

Speaking at a news conference at Tel Aviv airport after returning from Paris, Rabin said, "We have asked, via the United States for negotiations in the Middle East initially with the Jordanians, covering the problems of security, the environment, water and ecology."

Rabin said that after such discussions there should be talks soon in the region at foreign minister level in the presence of the (US) Secretary of State.

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin said Wednesday that Israeli-Jordanian talks would be held from July 18 in the Wadi Araba border region, near the Red Sea coast.

"We hope these negotiations will take place alternately in Israel and Jordan," Rabin said.

Rabin, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat received a UNESCO peace prize in Paris.

Referring to his talks with Arafat in Paris, Rabin noted that three Israeli-PLO commissions would be set up.

One would examine issues still unresolved when the May 4 Cairo agreement was signed launching Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho.

The second commission would try to speed up the transfer of civilian powers to the new Palestinian authority in areas such as health, education, tourism and taxation. Financial matters and organising elections would also be discussed.

Under the second stage of Palestinian self-rule the Israeli army is due to redeploy from the rest of the West Bank to allow elections to be held in the autonomous Gaza Strip and Jericho areas.

Arafat said he thought elections would be held "very soon."

The third commission would prepare for four-day talks between Israel, the PLO, Egypt and Jordan on the issue of Palestinian refugees displaced by the Middle East war in 1967.

Rabin said there were no discussions with the PLO on the possible release of Islamic Resistance Movement leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.

The Midnight File

Columbia blasts off

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. July 8: Columbia blasted off Friday with an international crew and a wet, wiggly cargo — thousands of fish, newts and sea urchins handpicked for this science mission. The 2,000-ton (1,800-metric ton) shuttle thundered off its oceanic pad at 12:43 pm (1643 GMT), right on time. The weather cooperated despite earlier concerns about storms, both here and at the shuttle emergency landing sites in West Africa. It is the 63rd space shuttle flight in 13 years and the 17th for Columbia. NASA's oldest shuttle, reports AP.

Rocket attack on Kabul, 12 die

ISLAMABAD, July 8: At least 12 civilians were killed and 44 injured as Kabul was slammed by a rocket barrage today, Radio Kabul reported. The broadcast monitored here said forces of rival Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and ex-Communist General Abdul Rashid Dostam fired a total of 97 rockets into the city. The attack targeting residential areas destroyed at least seven houses and a mosque, the radio said, adding the victims were all civilians, reports AFP.

Balladur for withdrawal of his troops from Rwanda

PARIS, July 8: French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur will make a personal plea to the UN Security Council in New York on Monday to relieve French troops in Rwanda by the end of the month, reports AFP.

An official statement issued Friday said Balladur would also hold talks beforehand with UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Officials in the French Prime Minister's office said Balladur was bidding for an "acceleration" in moves to set up a UN Peacekeeping Force so that France could stick to its deadline of withdrawing its own force by July 31.

With French troops facing an influx of nearly one million people into a safety zone it created last week in South-West Rwanda, Balladur would also seek "an increase" in international humanitarian aid, the officials said.

France's controversial UN-mandated mission, codenamed Operation Turquoise with 2,500 men, began on June 23 with France insisting it was aimed at protecting refugees from massacres that have killed an estimated half-a-million people.

Capture this week of the capital Kigali and the major southern town of Butare by forces of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) caused a massive influx of refugees into areas controlled by French troops, ill-equipped to provide large-scale relief.

The French Prime Minister took the decision to make a personal appearance in New York after repeating on several occasions that there was no question of French troops becoming a "buffer force" in Rwanda.

An AFP correspondent reported from Gikongoro, Rwanda, that rebels were clashing with Rwandan government troops just outside the French-secured safety zone.

After making a trip to Poland this week, Balladur said that French troops would withdraw from Rwanda by July 31 whether or not they were replaced by planned reinforcements to a UN mission already in the country, to be known as Minuar II.

JS secretariat

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commission' was held on June 4 with Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali in the chair. LGRD Minister Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder as a representative of the Prime Minister, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and Law Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz were present at the meeting. Neither the leader of the opposition, Sheikh Hasina, who is also a member of the committee, nor her nominee was present.

The two major decisions of the first meeting of the commission were to constitute the 'rules formulation committee' and to formulate the commission's own guidelines, the source added.

The parliament secretariat has already started working as an 'independent secretariat' following the passage of the bill on May 17.

The opposition parties who have been boycotting the session rejected the bill saying it failed to ensure independence of the secretariat.

Mostafiz

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people of certain countries wanting to give asylum to Taslema Nasreen.

If asylum were provided, "It would be an unfriendly act," he stated.

Terminating the role of the Opposition as very important for the success of any nation's foreign policy, Mostafiz expressed the hope that the Opposition would respond to the call of the Prime Minister and return to Parliament.

He said the Opposition could try to bring about amendments related to a caretaker government or any other subject by joining the Parliament rather than staying out of it.

He, however, termed the Opposition demand for a caretaker government as an example of 'bankruptcy in politics'.

Mostafiz Rahman said the SAARC was making progress in certain fields, particularly poverty alleviation. The organisation was contemplating a South Asian Development Fund shortly, he informed.

The Foreign Minister stressed the need for early repatriation of the Rohingyas and said he was asking the UNHCR to help expedite the process.

Bangladesh, Mostafiz said, is making all-out efforts to increase trade by putting more stress on economic diplomacy.

Speaking about the efforts to attract overseas investment, with a particular reference to the Prime Minister's Japan visit, Mostafiz emphasised that the main thrust has to come from the private sector. "We can only act as matchmakers."

The Foreign Minister described Bangladesh's foreign policy as one directed towards the search for peace at home and abroad.

He said the country now stands as the number four contributor to the UN's global peacekeeping operations.

No amount of ambassadors could have given us this recognition, which our role in peacekeeping has done," Mostafiz underlined.

Saifur

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sions will be confined to economic and trade matters, according to sources.

Manmohan is extending his stay in Dhaka in response to Saifur Rahman's invitation. He was scheduled to visit Dhaka last year. Saifur invited him during his visit to New Delhi in 1992. The Indian Minister had to postpone his return visit more than once because of domestic preoccupations.

Official talks between Manmohan and Saifur will concentrate mainly on issues of trade and commerce between the two neighbours. The Bangladesh side will emphasise the need for reducing the huge trade deficit between the two countries.

Manmohan Singh will also meet the leaders of the chamber bodies where discussions on trade promotion in the private sector will take place.

The Indian Finance Minister will also deliver a lecture on the "Reform Programmes in India" at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Affairs (BIISA).

Manmohan is scheduled to leave Dhaka in the evening on July 12.

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venture, installed the Surimi plant two years ago under a joint venture with South Korea's Seolim International Corporation. It had an annual export target of about six million US dollars, officials said.

But this industry is on the verge of closure following suspension of deep sea fishing by all the 14 trawlers owned by Sea Resources Ltd. Most of the trawlers are now moored in the Karnaphuli, crippled with all their navigational and communication equipment seized by the police.

As a result, the fish paste manufacturing industry, employing a new technology in this country, is not getting supply of enough new material in the form of trash fish, forcing the authorities to stop production, officials said.

Sea Resource officials said police seized navigational equipment from its godowns worth Taka two crore despite the company possessing valid documents for their purchase and import.

Questions have been raised by leading members of the country's business community whether the authorities could have proceeded with its investigations into the company's activities without seizing such vital operational spares and equipment.

The Factory Act provides that equipment and spares, without which an industrial unit cannot continue its normal operation should not be seized or attached.

Experts feel that this export-oriented deep sea fishing company should be allowed to resume its normal operations by immediately giving it back the seized goods.

Police investigations so far have failed to prove any wrongdoing by the company with regard to import of the impounded goods.