

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 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 15 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 86 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, bazaars, 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 turn into a social movement. We have only seen seasonal burst of interest

in books during 'boi mela' on specific occasions. There is need for channelling 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, Krishibank, 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 loanees 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 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.

Sanskritik Jote

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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.

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.

We expect a rise in industrial output growth of 10 per cent, for the fourth successive year," the report mentioned and also pointed out the declining inflation rate opening up new possibilities.

In FY 1995, the inflation rate is expected to be only 2.5 per cent — compared with 10 per cent in 1990 — and broad money supply is forecast to increase by 13 per cent," Smith New Court report said.

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The Daily Star

SAARC ministers' meet tomorrow

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nance 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.

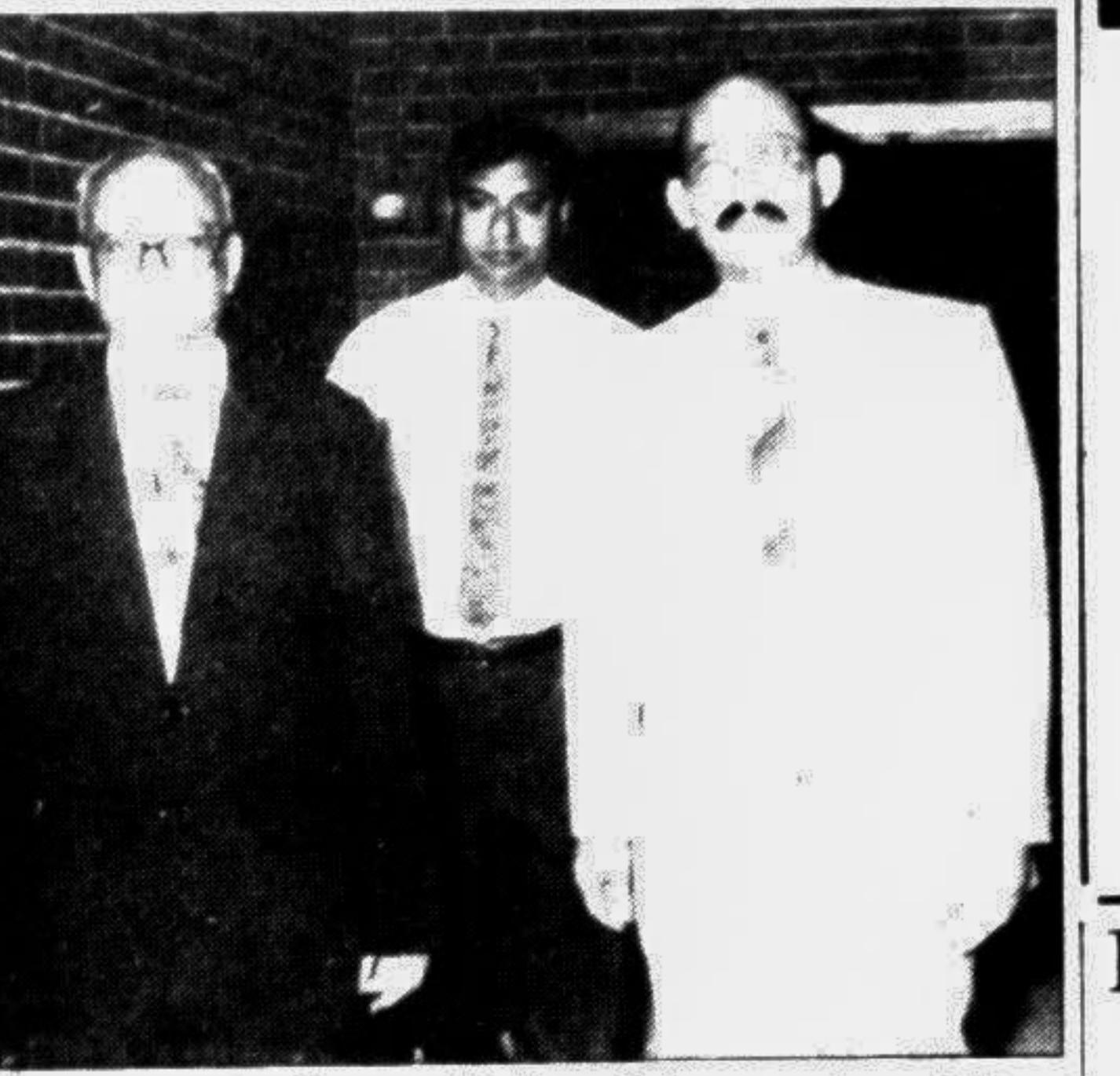
The attending ministers are also scheduled to visit a number of poverty alleviation projects run by Bangladeshi NGOs, including those of BRAC and the Grameen Bank.

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 Khush Kabi from ADAB.

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

It also includes Dr Maqsood 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



State Minister for Finance Mojibar Rahman welcomed the Nepalese State Minister for Commerce and Civil Supplies Surendra Prasad Chowdhury (R) who arrived yesterday to attend the SAARC Finance and Planning Ministers' conference beginning in the capital tomorrow. — Star photo

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 Maldivian team will be led by Dr Abdul Sattar Yoosuf, Deputy Minister of Planning. Nepal will be represented by a three-member team led by Surendra Prasad Chaudhury, 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 Jaffrey, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on

Financial and Economic Affairs.

It will also include the High Commissioner in Dhaka Anwar Kemal and Economic Counsellor M Sharuddin.

Though the SAARC framework does not provide for any official bilateral discussions, all the ministers and high officials are still expected to broach bilateral subjects, especially trade and commerce issues.

The guests will also be taken on a river cruise on board the MV Ostrich on July 11.

Arrangements have been made to accommodate most of the delegations at the Sheraton Hotel, which is also serving as the venue for the meetings of senior officials.

Most of the ministers are expected to arrive today.

SAARC Secretary General Y K Silwal is already having arrived yesterday in the capital, along with several senior officials of his secretariat.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman will preside over the business sessions after tomorrow's formal inauguration.

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-Ghali which was handed over Thursday evening by Yemen's Minister of Planning and Development Abel Karim al-Iryani.

President Ali Abdallah 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 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 Abel Karim al-Iryani, a key Northern official.

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

Referring to his talks with Arifat in Paris, Rabin noted that three Israeli-PLO commissioners 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.

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.

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 Yasser Arafat.

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