

DOWN TO EARTH Tree Plantation Drive in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

Dhaka was once a city with attractive verdant beauty, particularly in the Ramna area. That beauty has suffered gradual erosion with the steady growth of the urban population to meet their infrastructural requirements like housing, road networks, commercial and industrial undertakings.

This burgeoning process of urbanisation has claimed, among its victims, the cruel denudation of trees in many areas which once contributed to their scenic attraction. In some cases, denudation was random and gross that it seemed that we had forgotten the simple truth that trees are our friends and that when we cut down a tree, we should plant at least two new ones in its place.

Exact statistics appear to be lacking, but it seems clear that there has been a substantial depletion in the tree resources of the city. It was also observed in the past that although on the one hand, trees are planted by one agency, on the other hand, such trees are cut down by another agency for their development work.

Apart from their aesthetic aspect in urban perspective, trees act as a sink for absorbing carbon dioxide (CO₂) from atmosphere and contribute to the augmentation of oxygen in atmosphere thereby contributing to the improvement of ecological quality. Besides, tree is one of the main resources in our rural areas. The renewable tree resources play an important role in alleviating poverty, improving ecological balance and creating job opportunities in the rural areas.

Lately the physical environment of the metropolis has been receiving increasing attention. The current year's tree plantation season has already begun. This time we, however, note a difference in that the Prime Minister herself has been taking interest in launching a nationwide tree plantation programme with a view to turning afforestation into a social movement to maintain the ecological balance of the country for the very survival of the nation. To give a

fillip to the tree plantation programme, government has introduced the Prime Minister's Trophy for Tree Plantation. We were informed that discussion would be held in the capital and also at thana and district levels to create awareness among the people. Besides, tree fair would be held at Dhaka and at other places and the people would be provided with improved saplings at cheaper rates. A high-pitched publicity in this behalf is already in progress through the print and electronic media.

The agencies associated with the plantation programme sometimes seem to enter into a sort of competition on how many trees are planted with little care given to the need for proper maintenance of the newly planted trees. In many cases, the enthusiasm with which tree plantation drive is launched peters out when it comes to the task of proper maintenance. With the result that in most cases no clear record is available as to the number of plants that manage to survive. Some observers express doubt whether even ten per cent of the planted trees manage to survive each year. In this context, the problem of nurture is more challenging. In the opinion of knowledgeable sources, the persons charged with nurturing need to be tree-friendly and their work should not be a one-time ritual but it should be taken up on continuing basis.

Lately a big step has been taken by the Forest Department by adoption of a four-year City Afforestation Scheme which is already under execution with a total outlay of Tk 547.00 lakh covering the city of Dhaka along with five other main cities with their neighbourhoods. The project aims at afforesting the metropolitan city in a planned way to increase tree cover, assisting the development of the city's scenic beauty and creating a congenial environment through over-all development of amenities. Through implementation of this project, roads and link roads of the city, parks and recreation centres, factories, residential areas, marginal and fallow lands, flood protection embankments, etc.

will be planted with bushy and ornamental trees in a planned manner. Roadside and other open spaces will be planted with timber trees and the reserved areas will be planted with fruit trees. Under telephone and electric lines shade and ornamental trees will be planted.

The scheme has been given such importance that five interdependent steering committees one for each division and one at national level have been set up to ensure smooth implementation of the project. In the national committee as well as in the committee for Dhaka division, the Mayor of the Dhaka City Corporation has been associated. RAJUK has also been associated with the Dhaka Divisional Committee.

There is already a standing order of government that all agencies should keep a tree plantation component in their respective development programmes. Dhaka City Corporation is another agency responsible for plantation of trees in the city. During the current financial year, the Corporation has made a provision of Tk 51 lakh in its budget for the afforestation programme for the city. The Corporation takes pride that for its success in the tree plantation programme during 1992, it won the first prize under the classification of municipalities and corporations in the Prime Minister's Trophy. In 1992, the City Corporation reportedly planted 50,000 saplings in its ten zones of the city.

Rajdhani Unnayan Katripakha (RAJUK) is also associated with planting of trees in the areas under their administration. They have plans for plantation in Banani, Uttara, Baridhara, Shyampani (near Postogola), Pragati Sharani, and Janapath and some other areas. Moreover, they make a provision of two per cent in every scheme for the purpose of tree plantation.

There are some encouraging signs of people in general coming round to loving trees and wanting them more and more. In view of this, the plantation campaign needs to be continued round the year and to supplement it, felling of trees should be made punishable by law.



Eight Left parties brought out a procession in the city yesterday denouncing fundamentalism, communalism and called for resisting the Fatwabaz. — Star photo

Pro-democracy strikes cripple Nigeria

LAGOS, July 15: Lagos and other Nigerian cities were close to a standstill today after nearly two weeks of pro-democracy strikes led by oil unions demanding an end to military rule, reports Reuter.

Many banks, offices and shops in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital, remained shut as workers stayed at home either to back the strike or because of a lack of public transport. Many schools were closed due partly to a strike by teachers in the city of six million people.

The strike by oil workers demanding the release of Moshod Abiola, widely believed to have won last year's presidential election, has severely disrupted domestic fuel supplies and led to long queues at the few filling stations still selling petrol.

Abiola, a wealthy businessman from southwestern Nigeria, was denied bail on Thursday by an Abuja court trying him for treason after he proclaimed himself president in defiance of Nigeria's military rulers.

The strikes to force General Sani Abacha's administration to free Abiola is taking its toll on Lagos infrastructure, including water and electricity supplies. "The situation is becoming unbearable," said Emily Fawehinmi, a federal civil servant.

The strikes to force Abacha to free Abiola and other political detainees held since May is set to intensify next week. A 10-day deadline given by the 3.5 million-strong umbrella Nigeria Labour Congress to the government to free the man expires on Monday.

Couple murdered in Pirojpur

From Staff Correspondent
BARISAL, July 15: Unidentified assailants killed a couple and injured their young son at Fuljhuri village of Mathbaria thana under Pirojpur district last night.

Police attributed the killings to rivalry between two sides over possession of land.

According to witnesses, Abul Hossain, 55, his wife Ambia Khatun, 40, and son Faruk, 20, were attacked by the assailants while they were on their way to a neighbour's house. Abul Hossain and his wife died on the spot as crackers were hurled at them both were stabbed repeatedly with knives. Their son Faruk, managed to flee with stab injuries.

Faruk lodged a case with the Mathbaria police accusing nine persons of murdering his parents.

Comet

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flected in a flash on Europa," Crisp said.

Although dark clouds covered Siding Springs Friday, he expected the clouds to move out of the semi-desert area that is suffering from one of its longest droughts.

Other scientists and astronomers will be hoping to see the collisions from observatories around the world.

The Midnight File

Pakistan suggests secy-level talks with India next week

NEW DELHI, July 15: Pakistan today suggested joint secretary level talks with India next week to review the implementation of a code of conduct for diplomats. Pakistan and India each expelled two of the other's officials on Tuesday in tit-for-tat moves worsening a spy row between old enemies, reports Reuter.

Rwandan unity govt to be sworn in Monday

UNITED NATIONS, July 15: A Rwandan national government of unity will be sworn in at Kigali, on Monday, an official of the victorious rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front said here today. Claude Dusaidi said that an investiture ceremony for the new government will start at noon local time, reports AFP.

Battle of 'big dogs'

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you leave your end of the field open and that is very dangerous.

The Brazilians don't simply want to win, they want to win beautifully. They want to thrill the fans — and each other. They want everything about their games, from the first round to the final, to be memorable.

That's what made the demeanor of the semifinal — if not the result, of course — so disappointing to them.

It is very difficult to face a team that seems to want a draw and then a shootout," said Bebeto, Romario's partner in front for Brazil.

"Italy feel as good as Brazil, and will play for victory," Italian coach Arrigo Sacchi said. "We think we can control their impressive offence. But there is a major difference between strategy and its accomplishment on the field. Certainly it will be another exhausting game for us."

Baggio's injury could spoil what shapes up as a match of two of the world's finest players and top scorers in the tournament; he and Brazil's Romario each have five goals, one behind Hristo Stoichkov of Bulgaria and Oleg Salenko of Russia.

Baggio, who scored five of Italy's eight goals in the competition, is a questionable starter, doctors said.

"At the moment his chances to play are 50 per cent. He will be rested for 48 hours. We hope for a positive solution," Dr. Andrea Ferretti said Thursday.

Sacchi said, "We risk to lose Roberto in the moment we had just recovered him, in the moment he had reached his peak condition."

Gianfranco Zola, who has served a two-game suspension, likely would start if Baggio can't.

The Italians will be without top-defender Alessandro Costacurta, who was suspended after getting his second yellow card against Bulgaria, and Mauro Tassotti is also ineligible.

Brazil will be missing defender Leonardo, who drew a four-game suspension for elbowing Tab Ramos in the game against the United States.

Unlike Brazil, who have lived up to their favourite's role throughout the tournament, Italy struggled early and barely survived the earlier rounds. Dino Baggio carried the team in the first round, and Roberto, who is no relation, came to life in the three latest games.

A week ago, or two weeks ago, it did not look good for Italy, captain Paolo Maldini said. "But we have had perseverance and we have had dedication, and now we are through to the final."

Palestinians have right to fly flag on Al Aqsa: Arafat

GAZA CITY, July 15: Israeli officials criticised PLO leader Yasser Arafat and a leading deputy on Friday for asserting that Palestinians have the right to fly their flag in Jerusalem, reports AP.

The fate of Jerusalem is one of the stickiest unresolved issues in Israel-PLO peace talks. Israel claims east Jerusalem as part of its capital, but Palestinians want it as capital of a would-be state in the West Bank and Gaza.

Arafat's aide Yasser Abed Rabbo was quoted by Israeli media as vowing Thursday that Palestinians would regain all of Israel and the occupied territories and fly a flag over Al-Aqsa mosque, Islam's third holiest site.

Asked about Abed Rabbo's comments, Arafat said: "It is my right to raise the Palestinian flag over Jerusalem, over the walls of Jerusalem and over the minarets of Jerusalem and the churches of Jerusalem. This is my right."

Hungarian to referee WC final match

LOS ANGELES, July 15: Sandro Puhl of Hungary will referee the World Cup final between Brazil and Italy. FIFA said today, reports AFP.

Linesmen will be Paraguays Venancio Zarate Vazquez and Jean's Mohammed Fanael.

Puhl, 39, on Thursday, has handled three matches so far in his first World Cup. He booked two Spaniards in the Spain-Italy quarter-final match but missed Mauro Tassotti breaking Luis Enrique's nose with his elbow.

He also refereed the Brazil-Sweden first round game when he showed Brazilian defender Aldair a yellow card, and Norway-Mexico when he booked a Mexican.

Puhl is the first European to referee the World Cup final since 1978.

Soil-friendly fertiliser

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Dr Khaleque's invention was a follow-up of British scientist Prof Bremer's work which after four years of painstaking research beginning in 1985 revealed that many cropland cannot absorb micro-nutrients like copper, bronze, etc available in the Bangladeshi soil.

Prof Bremer, who was on a UN assignment in Bangladesh, was awarded Knighthood by Queen Elizabeth in 1992 for his important research.

Dr Khaleque, also present during yesterday's field trip, told The Daily Star that Japanese scientist Masauki Fufuoka discovered 30 years ago that natural and biological fertiliser, conserved in the soil, are enough for cultivation if the essential dose of micro-nutrients is induced in the soil.

After Fufuoka's revelation scientists started research on the subject. The London University offered support to Dr Khaleque to carry out his research in Bangladesh after Prof Bremer's work.

Dr Khaleque said chemical fertilisers have no photo-hormone, which regulates the whole metabolism of the plant during its life-cycle.

He said the long-term degrading effect of chemical fertiliser was now an established fact. The soil loses its natural composition and biological quality because of chemical fertiliser, he said quoting scientific research. "I am still researching on sarna", the modest Bangladeshi

scientist, who still holds the Michaelemas chair of the university, told The Daily Star.

London University spent 16,000 pounds sterling annually on Dr Khaleque's research. His first finding was a birth control medicine — fertility arresting vaccine — which was purchased by the US Auto-pharmaceuticals for marketing.

Dr Khaleque said that currently he has a small factory in Chittagong with a daily production capacity of 3,000 to 4,000 packets of his wonder fertiliser sarna.

Also, sarna has been exported to Ethiopia on an experimental basis, Khaleque added.

Yousuf Ali, owner of Agro-Trading Syndicate, the marketing agency of sarna, told The Daily Star that he had distributed about 10,000 packets of sarna during the present aus season across the country. "I got a tremendous response from the farmers," he added.

Captain (ret'd) Afzal, a sarna dealer for Chandpur district, told this correspondent: "Seventy per cent of land under

Rains kill 200 in India since June

NEW DELHI, July 15: At least 200 people have been killed and hundreds made homeless in heavy monsoon rains lashing parts of India since June, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said today, reports Reuter.

Strikes against Koirala

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until Koirala was removed and a multi-party interim government was formed to conduct free and fair elections.

Koirala has also been facing heavy opposition within the NC, which has been split into two groups, one supporting Koirala and the other supporting the NC party chief, Ganesh Man Singh.

NC General Secretary Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, who is a supporter of Singh, has denounced the King's decision to dissolve Parliament and appoint Koirala as caretaker premier.

It is regrettable that the King has accepted the wrong advice of a prime minister who has already been pushed to a minority, Nidhi said.

The time has come to launch a political movement jointly with the leftist factions to dismiss the Koirala government and form an all-party interim government in order to conduct free, fair and impartial elections," he said.

The chairman of the suspended upper house of Parliament, Beni Bahadur Karki, who is also a member of the NC, said he doubted if the mid-term polls could be held in November.

Speaking on state-run radio, Karki said: "I feel there had been a deep conspiracy behind the dissolution of Parliament and announcement of mid-term polls."

The NCP-UML, the country's largest opposition party, Thursday sent a five-day ultimatum to King Birendra threatening to launch massive protests across the country if Koirala was not dismissed within five days.

US to snap ties

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opportunity to have that happen is one we wanted to grasp as soon as possible," the Secretary said.

Christopher said that on his visit to the Middle East, he will talk with Yasser Arafat about the support he needs for Palestinian autonomy.

Wahab dead

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and Associated Press (AP) of America.

He started as a stringer to the Hindu (Madras) and worked for the Star of India (Calcutta) as staff correspondent and then joined the Publicity Department of the Government of Bengal. He later joined the Statesman (Calcutta).

After liberation of Bangladesh, the veteran journalist was appointed as Managing Director and Administrator of the Morning News and Director General and Chairman of the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB).

Wahab, who served as a part-time teacher in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism of Dhaka University for more than a decade.

He had also been awarded the Ekushe Padak in 1979 and Kazi Mahabubullah and Zebunnesa Trust Award for his outstanding contribution to journalism.

A founder member of the Jatiya Press Club, Wahab was president of the East Pakistan Union of Journalists.

Wahab was also the author of 'One Man's Agony', a record of his experience of the days of 1971 Liberation War when his only brother, Abdul Ahad, Solicitor, was killed by the Pakistan occupation army.

He left behind his wife, five daughters, two sons and a number of grandchildren.

BSS adds: President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday expressed his deep shock and sorrow at the death of Abdul Wahab.

In a condolence message President Biswas recalled the contribution of late Wahab to the profession of journalism. In his death the country has lost an eminent journalist.

ROK cops tear down Kim's mourning posters, arrest 20

SEOUL, July 15: South Korean riot police raided a university in the southern city of Kwangju today, tore down Kim Il-Sung mourning posters and arrested 20 radicals after a pitched battle with tear gas and fire bombs, news reports said, says AFP.

Preliminary reports said the police tore down an altar set up on the campus by the radical students for mourners to pay their respects to the late North Korean President.

SPGRC urges govt Press Pakistan to take back its nationals

A leader of the stranded Pakistanis here yesterday urged the Bangladesh government to create pressure on the Pakistan government to immediately take back its nationals living in squalid camps across Bangladesh, reports UNB.

In a statement, chief patron of the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC), Alhaj M Nasim Khan demanded early repatriation of the 3,000 families as per the joint declaration issued August 12, 1992 at the end of the first official visit of Pakistan by Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

If the joint declaration of August 12 is not implemented immediately, he warned the stranded Pakistanis may also stage a long march by crossing the international border and court arrest en masse.

Egypt ready to help settle Kashmir issue

ISLAMABAD, July 15: Egyptian Justice Minister Farouk Seif-Nasr said today his country would be ready to help Pakistan and India settle their dispute over the Himalayan region of Kashmir, reports Reuter.

Egypt is ready to give any kind of assistance for resolving the Kashmir problem if asked by Pakistan and India," the local PPI news agency quoted him as telling reporters in Islamabad before returning home after a four-day visit.

Islamic cleric jailed for torturing wife

ISLAMABAD: An Islamic cleric who tortured his wife with electric rods for allegedly maligning him to their neighbours has been sentenced to 30 years in jail, reports AP.

After imposing the maximum sentence against Mohammed Hafiz Sharif, the Special Courts Judge Mahmud Ahmed said he was sorry the sentence couldn't be stiffer given the viciousness of the crime, according to news reports Friday.

"It can safely be said that (the crime) was worse than murder," Ahmed said in a report carried by the state-run news agency, Associated Press of Pakistan. The sentence was handed down on Thursday. It wasn't known whether Sharif would appeal.

The accused, although the Imam (cleric) of the mosque, has behaved in a manner which was devoid of civility," Judge Ahmed reportedly said.



Raina and Magnum, two Indian elephants, frolic in the water inside their compound at the Hagenbeek Animal Park in Hamburg yesterday as they enjoy the over 30 degree centigrade temperature. — AFP photo

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