

# DOWN TO EARTH

## Limited Recreational Facilities

By A S M Nurunnabi

At present there is limited scope for recreation of the dwellers of the Dhaka city. The big question that confronts a citizen after a hard day's work is how to pass his leisure hours in the evening. The life of most of the city people now follows a sort of monotonous and mechanised pattern. They leave for their respective jobs or business, in the morning, work all day long and when they come back home, the same routine is followed by most of them: lounging in the living room, viewing TV or video and finally going to bed to sleep. In fact, Dhaka suffers from 'evening blues' which create a feeling of captivity and confinement in their own homes.

In other metropolises around the world, people are known to enjoy blithesome evenings when they shake off all the semblance of groovy life which, in turn creates new zest and energy in their day to day life. Such recreational climate is created by a host of parks, cinema halls, theatres, opera houses, fairs, etc. We are yet far from creating such recreational opportunities.

In the context of our social ethos, the recreational needs of the majority of the city dwellers are simple in nature. Yet in the frenzy of rapid urban growth, we seem to have failed to provide for such simple recreational imperatives.

In this context, existence of open spaces and parks provides recreation in simple form. These simple needs are already inadequate, considering the rapid growth of the city population. Dhaka city once prided itself on its large open spaces, particularly in Ramna area. The inexorable process of growth and development of the city has taken its toll on the available open spaces.

Now most of the city's important open spaces are no longer available for the citizens' recreational use. The



American Ambassador David N Merrill at an exhibition of paintings by Kanak Chanda (L) at Gallery Tone in the city yesterday.

Star photo

### Court rules Abiola's arrest, trial illegal

LAGOS, Oct 21: Nigeria's federal high court today ruled illegal the arrest, detention and trial on treason charges of opposition leader Moshood Abiola; his lawyer Femi Falana told AFP.

Judge Obafemi Jinadu said Nigeria's ruling military junta had not proven that Abiola's alleged crimes warranted his detention, judicial officials added.

### Manpower export

From Page 1 Col 4  
hanced punishment, including imprisonment and stiff fines, for those involved in wrongdoings in the manpower export business.

A provision to compensate job seekers keen to go abroad for any financial losses may also be included. Such compensations will be realised from the agents responsible.

Special tribunals for the trial of offences related to manpower export is also under consideration.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labour and Manpower has already taken actions against a number of recruiting agencies for certain irregularities in recruiting workers for employment abroad. Licences of 25 agencies have already been cancelled while those of 10 others remain suspended.

Some 361 recruiting agencies are now operating in the country under licences issued by the government.

Editor : Mahfuz Anam

Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on  
Tuesday Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City  
Ltd, 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News &  
Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmondi, D-2,  
ABX: 300092-4, Commercial: 500081 (Direct), Fax No:  
2322-2323.

Ramna Park and the Suhrawardy Uddyan have lately lost much of their charm because of the growing presence of anti-social elements. The Sishu Park is so much crowded with elders and other undesirable elements that its attraction for children has much eroded. In the Sangsab Bhaban area, some tempting open spaces are available, but when evening sets in, the fear from anti-social elements looms in that area also.

Other recreational aspects cover the movies and the theatres. The movie world does not much attract the middle class viewers to cinema halls because of their poor conditions. Besides, it has lost much of its appeal on account of the burgeoning use of home videos and televisions with dish antennae.

As regards theatres, there exists a lot of interest and enthusiasm. But the existing show houses are very few in number. The Mahila Samity and the Girl Guides Auditoriums are all that we have in this big city. There is another auditorium within the precincts of the Usman Uddyan which is reserved for select functions not open to general public.

In other advanced countries, art galleries, museums and public libraries also provide an outlet for intellectual recreation. These facilities in our city are now at a nascent stage, and do not have enough pull with those having intellectual interests.

The "community concept" that breeds community centres has not been given proper status in the city. The community centres that exist are mostly used as venues for wedding feasts and other festive purposes. The business motives behind these establishments are too obvious.

Some of the younger generation of the city are seen nowadays to make a way out of the monotonous evenings by passing their time in the city's

newly mushroomed fast food joints, eating, and gossiping. In the posh neighbourhoods like Gulshan and Banani, youngsters are seen to pass their evening away sitting on the pavements or on the bonnets of their cars.

What can be done to improve the existing situation? Some suggestions are made. According to these suggestions, the entire area adjacent to the Dhaka University starting from the leaders' mazars, to Shahbagh along the Suhrawardy Uddyan can be turned into a walkway with proper lighting arrangements. Public vehicles may be regulated there from a certain hour. Mobile dining vehicles may roam about selling food items. Temporary book and handicraft shops can add to the attraction of the place. As the Baily Road has become quite a place of public attraction for fashion, literature and theatre, this road may also be made into another promenade by blocking the traffic at dusk and using the Circuit House Road as the by-pass.

For old Dhaka, the big area that will be ultimately available after shifting the Dhaka Central Jail can be used for a properly laid out public park with ancillary facilities. This may largely compensate the loss which has already taken place in the availability of open space in the old part of the city. Another possibility is that the Lalbagh Fort may be made a public area like India's Red Fort where hundreds of visitors enjoy light-and-sound display of ancestral history.

The above suggestions can be with good management, the ways out of the dismal evenings of city life. Some observers feel after seeing the crowd at Baisakhi Mela (Bengali New Year's Fair) and Ekushey Boi Mela and other fairs that the city dwellers will greatly appreciate such measures to shake off their evening blues.

At least three persons were injured in a bomb explosion at the north gate of Baitul Mokarram in the city yesterday afternoon.

The explosion took place just before a procession of the Sammilita Sangram Parishad, a combine of several fundamentalist organisations, was brought out from the spot, witnesses said.

The injured identified as Maulana Zubair Ahmed Faruki, 31, Abul Kalam Azad, 25 and Farhad Hossain — were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where Zubair was admitted while the two others were released after first aid.

The parishad brought out the procession protesting the Commonwealth brokered government-opposition dialogue and Sir Ninian's involvement in it.

FFs' Action Council gheraoes Defence Ministry today

By Staff Correspondent

The central Action Council of the Bangladesh Mukti Joddha Kalyan Trust plans to gherao the Defence Ministry at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar today at 9 am to press home their demands.

Meanwhile, 47 elite and educationists including Begum Sofia Kamal, Poet Shamsur Rahman, Belal Chowdhury, Rashid Haider, Mahadev Shah and Ataus Samad have extended their support to the demand of the Action Council.

The sit-in will begin at 11 am and continue till 2 pm, said a press release of the LDF.

It said similar programmes will also be organised in other areas.

The LDF called upon the people to join the sit-in.

Referring to the Commonwealth brokered government-opposition dialogue the front, comprising eight left parties, said it is an attempt to compromise on the caretaker government issue.

Burt Lancaster

dead

LOS ANGELES, Oct 21: Actor Burt Lancaster, a Hollywood icon who started his career as a circus acrobat and went on to win an Oscar for the lead role in 'Elmer Gantry', has died at the age of 80, his wife Susie said today, reports AFP.

The actor who suffered a stroke four years ago that left him partially paralysed died late Thursday, his wife said.

In a career that included more than 70 films, Lancaster won the festival of Venice Award in 1962 for the Birdman of Alcatraz and created new sensual images in a scene at the edge of the surf in 'From Here to Eternity' in 1953.

Lancaster, known for his intelligent, tough-guy roles, remained active well into his 70s. He starred in 1989's 'Field of Dreams' and was highly praised for his portrayal of a party criminal in 'Atlantic City'.

Narayanganj, due to start a week-long visit that will include the signing of important banking agreements and a meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, was set to leave in another aircraft later on Friday.

### India urged to provide 'zero tariff' access

By Staff Correspondent

The Left Democratic Front (LDF) has decided to stage a sit-in near the Secretariat today demanding formation of a caretaker government to conduct elections free from black money and terrorism and ban on 'communal politics and protesting World Bank-IMF role.'

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia exchanging views on various local and national issues with a delegation from the Gulshan, Cantonment and Uttara areas of the city which called on her at her Hare Road office yesterday.

— PID photo

### PM meets elite

From Page 1 Col 5  
jam, construction of community centre, auditorium and playground.

The Prime Minister underscored the need for peace and discipline for resolving all problems and ensuring development.

She said her government is committed to fulfilling its pledges made to the people and sought cooperation from all to implement development programmes undertaken by the government.

Referring to the local problems, the Prime Minister said there are huge problems in the country and it is not possible to resolve the problems in a day because of limited resources.

Begum Zia informed the elite that the government was working in a planned way to remove all problems in phases.

The Prime Minister stressed the need for people's awareness in increasing civic amenities and said it is not possible to remove problems by formulating laws.

Teachers, doctors, business men, social workers and local MP Major (Reid) Kamruddin spoke on the occasion.

### Kumaratunga offered bribes?

COLOMBO, Oct 21: Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga says she has been offered bribes not to cancel contracts awarded by the government she ousted, reports AP.

Kumaratunga reported the offers to the Bribery Commissioner, the government's watchdog against corruption in high places, officials said Friday.

The prime minister informed us over telephone and we are launching an investigation. We are waiting for an official statement from her," said Rienzie Perera, a police officer assisting the commissioner.

Perera refused to give details of Kumaratunga's complaint or say how much money was offered and by whom.

The sources said the luggage belonged to a State Department employee who was scheduled to travel to Tel Aviv on Wednesday night.

"We don't know what happened," Pyllis Young, a State Department spokeswoman, told the newspaper. "The briefcase has been turned over to the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service Office in New York to determine what's in it."

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Opposition leader Gamini Dissanayake, who is a candidate in next month's presidential election, was accused of fraud by the Bribery Commissioner earlier this month.

Dissanayake faces charges of importing vehicles for official use but selling them for personal profit while he was a cabinet minister.

### Seoul bridge collapse kills 32

From Page 1 Col 2

ied as schoolgirls and one was an immigrant Filipino computer programmer.

"It was a nightmare. I do not want to think about it again," said Kim Min-ja, a 38-year-old grammar school teacher who was rescued after her car fell directly into the river.

"I felt the car shaking suddenly and something caving in, then I passed out," she told the semi-official Yonhap news agency. "When I regained consciousness, water was rushing into the car. I left through a broken window, swam away, and was saved."

Mrs Kim said she was travelling in the car with two other teachers, one who was rescued and one who was missing.

Another witness, whose car was on a ramp leading to the Sungsu bridge when it collapsed, described the panic he had seen.

"I saw cars stopping on the bridge and trying to back up. Other people got out and ran away from the break in the bridge," Shin Hyong-kyu, a 41-year-old businessman told The Associated Press. "If I had been five minutes earlier, I would have died."

Rescue officials said the number of dead could still rise, as divers were still searching the murky waters around the collapse. Many of the 17 injured were in critical condition.

South Korean police rescue helicopters hover over the Han river after the Sungsu bridge in the capital Seoul collapsed during morning rush hours yesterday, killing at least 32 commuters.

— AFP photo

# The Midnight File

## No secret N-activity in Iraq

MANAMA, Oct 21: There has been no sign of secret nuclear activity by Iraq for nearly two years, a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency said Friday. "We've not detected any proscribed activities," said Garry Dillon of Britain, who left Baghdad earlier in the day after taking water samples from 16 locations along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to check for radioactivity. The samples will be analysed in the United States, Britain or France, reports AP.

## Rosario jailed for helping husband spy for Russia

ALEXANDRIA (Virginia), Oct 21: Rosario Ames, wife of CIA turnout Aldrich Ames, was sentenced to five years and three months in prison, today for helping him spy for Russia. The sentence imposed by US District Judge Claude Hilton was the lowest possible amount under the terms of a plea agreement in which she had admitted her guilt in helping her husband spy in what prosecutors called one of the worst espionage cases in US history, reports Reuter.

## 5 teenagers arrested

From Page 1 Col 7  
Ten, unemployed,