

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 prides itself on its large open spaces, particularly in the 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

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 Sangsad 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 Usmany 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' mazzars, 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 Bally 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 can 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 Bot Mela and other fairs that the city dwellers will greatly appreciate such measures to shake off their evening blues.



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

6 killed in Narayanganj road accidents

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Oct 21: Six people were killed and 15 others injured in four road accidents in the district today, police and witnesses said.

Ten of the injured were stated to be in serious condition, sources said. Three people were killed and 15 injured when a Dhaka-bound truck from Sylhet rammed a road-side fruit shop at Shimrail in Siddhirganj thana at around 11:30 am.

Two of the dead were identified as Sadeq Hossain, 45, a crane driver of Kartim Jute Mills and Md Shahidulla, 40. The third victim was a blind beggar aged about 35.

Of the injured, three were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and six to Narayanganj General Hospital.

Police arrested one person from the spot after a mob attacked a policeman on duty.

Havilder Manindra received serious injuries.

In another accident, one Ainul Haq alias, Tota Mia, 30, was crushed under the wheels of a bus at Langolbandh in Bandar thana at about 4:30 pm while he was crossing the road.

An unidentified labourer aged about 25 died when a Dhaka-bound bus from Daudkandi hit him near Meghna bridge in Sonargaon thana in the morning.

In yet another accident, an unidentified woman, 40, was run over by a Dhaka-bound private car from Chittagong on Kanchanpur bridge in Sonargaon thana at around 11 am.

The six bodies were sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for autopsy.

Separate cases were filed with Sonargaon, Bandar and Siddhirganj police stations.

PM meets elite

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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, businessmen, social workers and local MP Major (Retd) Kamrul Islam 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 Rennie 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.

Kumaratunga, who came to power in August 16 parliamentary elections, has cancelled several contracts worth millions of dollars, and has ordered an investigation into alleged corruption by the United National Party (UNP) which governed Sri Lanka for the previous 17 years.

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.

3 hurt in blast near Baitul Mokarram

By Staff Correspondent

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 Sammilta Sangram Parishad, a combine of several fundamentalist organisations, was brought out from the spot, witnesses said.

The injured identified as — Maulana Zubaer Ahmed Faruk, 31, Abul Kalam Azad, 25 and Farhad Hossain — were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where Zubaer 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 Mukjoddha 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 Sufia Kamal, Poet Shamsur Rahman, Belal Chowdhury, Rashid Haider, Mahadev Shaha and Aftab Samad have extended their support to the demand of the Action Council.

LDF sit-in near Sectt today

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.

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 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 AP.

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 petty criminal in 'Atlantic City' in 1980.

Seoul bridge collapse kills 32

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fled 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.

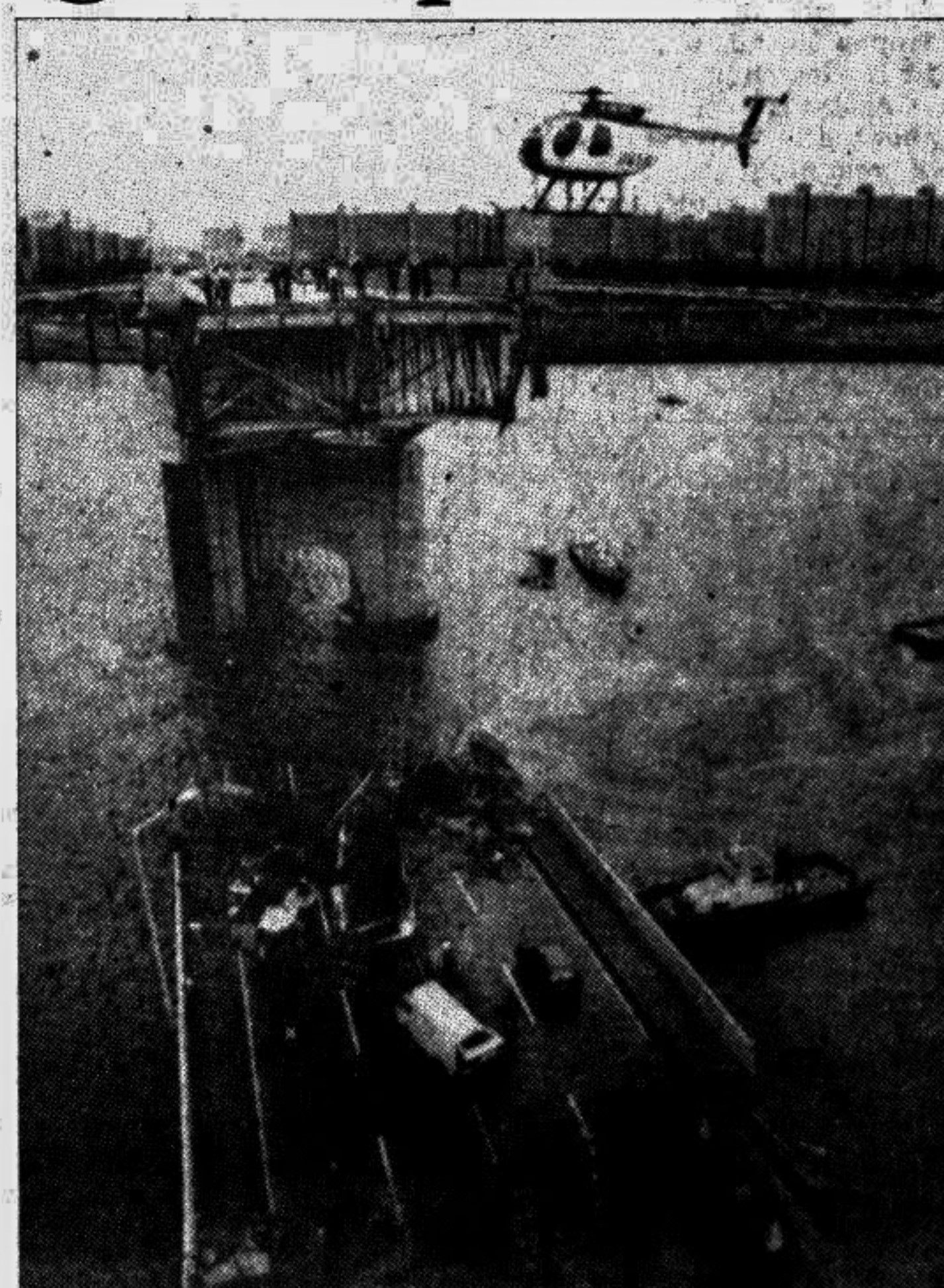
"I felt the car shaking suddenly and something caving in, then I passed out," she told the semi-official Yonhap news agency. "When I regained consciousness, water was rushing into the car. I left through a broken window, swam away, and was saved."

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 Songso 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 Sungsoo 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 turncoat 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

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Ten), unemployed, son of Azizul Islam (clerk) of B-19/Ja. City Colony, and Amjad Hossain alias Amjad Chowdhury, a vagabond, son of Alauddin, a guard at a motor workshop.

In a 12-hour swoop on various parts of the city Thursday night, police squads led by detective officers rounded up the culprits and recovered from their possession some stolen goods including a video cassette player and part of the loot from the sale of a stereo record player which the juvenile delinquents had stolen from the house after killing the poor boy.

Police said the accused confessed that Zahidul Islam Prince, 16, and Habibur Rahman alias Habib, 17, were the masterminds of the macabre murder. It was Prince who, through a common friend named Kowshik, had befriended Isha barely a week before the crime.

Police first arrested Habib from his Shahjahanpur Railway Colony residence around midnight Thursday by tracking down the video rental shop Ranghanu Video Club from where the blue film 'Dream Lover' was rented by Habib on October 17, two days before the murder.

Habib later led police to his four accomplices.

Habib reportedly confessed after arrest that the plan for a robbery at Isha's flat was hatched by himself and Isha's new friend Prince on October 17, the day Isha reportedly met Prince at a video shop in Shahjahanpur and requested him to come to his house two days later, October 19, so that they may watch an adult movie. Isha was obviously taking advantage of the fact that both his parents were away from home for a considerable part of the day for them to indulge in the naughty frolic.

As per plans, Prince cleverly restrained Isha's friend Kowshik who, too, was supposed to join them for the video viewing, from going to Isha's house by telling him that he (Prince) would not be able to make it because his mother was sick. Having done so, Prince had a rendezvous with Habib, Amjad, Biplob and Babu in Shahjahanpur at eight in the morning. The five then set out for Isha's house at Hatkhola Road.

Isha's mother had left for her school at around 7:15 am.

At about 8:45 am Prince climbed up the stairs to the sixth-storey flat and gave Isha the video tape. He also told Isha that some friends were waiting downstairs and asked if they could also join. To this Isha agreed and three of Prince's accomplices, with the exception of Amjad who was left to keep a watch downstairs, entered Isha's flat.

The unsuspecting victim put the tape on as the rest sat down to watch.

Soon, within 10 minutes, Biplob deliberately picked a quarrel with Isha by tearing up the day's newspaper. As Isha protested, Biplob pounced on him and got a stranglehold around the boy's neck, pinning him down on the bed. He punched the boy mercilessly and at one stage Isha, totally overpowered, became unconscious due to asphyxiation. Biplob then asked Habib to fetch the bottle from the kitchen. With it Habib slit Isha's throat. Biplob then took the bottle and made sure the incision was deep enough.

The criminals then unsuccessfully tried to break open a steel almirah. Frustrated, they kicked open the wardrobe and decamped with certain valuables, the nature of which police declined to disclose for the sake of investigation. However, police said a stolen

Leaders

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Sir Ninian reportedly expressed satisfaction over the initial progress of the dialogue for resolving the political impasse in the country.

The talks resume today at the Sangsad Bhaban at 6:30 pm after a day's adjournment.

Leaders from two sides will also meet Ninian tomorrow to brief him on the progress of the talks.

VCP and Taka 638, part of the sale proceeds from a stereo cassette player, were recovered Thursday night.

Biplob took Taka 400, Amjad Tk 200 and the other three Tk 300 each after disposing off the stereo recorder.

Police also recovered a pair of trousers from a tailoring shop, ordered by Babu with his share of the loot.

Meanwhile, police said Ambia Begum, 40, the former maidservant at Isha's house, who was arrested Wednesday after being accused by the slain boy's mother, was in no way involved in the crime.

Police said poor Ambia Begum who reported the case of the opened front door to the victim's flat to neighbours and the boy's mother after going to her school had shown a great sense of loyalty to her former employers. Ambia was dismissed by Isha's mother Shawlat Begum only three days before the crime. But initially, Shawlat Begum who became hysterical after discovering her son's body, had accused the maid, suspecting that she had wrought vengeance for her dismissal.

The arrested teenagers are likely to be produced before the court today. Police may seek a remand for completing investigations.

Meanwhile, Isha was buried at the family graveyard in Dargapara, Rajshahi Thursday.

Police yesterday released Mobassher Hossain Caesar, 19, one of Isha's friends and flat-mates, who was picked up for questioning. Harun Mia, the receptionist at the Elyseum apartments, arrested Wednesday on suspicion and now in DB remand, is also believed to be uninvolved in the crime.

Hasina

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and poverty have plagued the country but there is no pragmatic plan of the government to solve the basic problems of commonman. She gave comparative data of the landless and the unemployed and of poverty from 1972 to 1994.

She demanded that thana administration should be run by elected representative so that rural people could be benefited. She also suggested a strong village-based economic infrastructure.

During her 3-day visit to this region, Hasina also addressed gatherings at different places, including Harinathpur, Muladi and Mehendiganj.

She will address a public meeting at Patuakhali tomorrow (Saturday).

Flights to India

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according to reports received in Dhaka.

However, Bangladesh and Pakistan still have aviation and shipping restrictions.

Bangladesh banned all Biman flights to India on September 30 due to outbreak of plague there.

Restrictions on travel and shipping to India are still in force in some of the Middle East countries excepting Bahrain.

Airlines flights started between India and Bahrain a few days ago.

Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates severed air and shipping links on September 28 after pneumonic plague was diagnosed in Western India. At least, 60 people died of plague.

Rohingya

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ed three transit points to resume the repatriation. Bangladesh officials said the repatriation process will continue from now on.

Nearly 1,69,000 Rohingya refugees are still living in 17 camps in Teknaf areas.

Meanwhile, some 130 Myanmar nationals boarding five engine boats arrived in Teknaf today.

Bangladesh officials said that the Myanmar nationals had valid transit papers and were here to meet their relatives staying in the refugee camps.



American Ambassador David N Merrill at an exhibition of paintings by Kanak Chandra (L) and 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 Mashood Abiola, his lawyer Femi Falana told AFP.

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

Manpower export

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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.

India urged to provide 'zero tariff' access

CALCUTTA, Oct 21: The High Commissioner of Bangladesh in India, Farooq Sobhan, today called upon the government of India to provide 'zero tariff' access to consumer goods from Bangladesh as a step to increase its export and minimise the trade imbalance between the two countries, reports PTI.

He was addressing the members of Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BNCCI) here.

He urged the Indian businessmen and industrialists to enter into joint ventures and collaborations with their Bangladeshi counterparts and exploit the opportunities of liberal trade policy there.

Indian VP's plane returns 30 minutes after takeoff

NEW DELHI, Oct 21: An Air India plane carrying Vice President K R Narayanan on an official visit to China returned to New Delhi 30 minutes after takeoff today because of problems with the undercarriage, officials said, reports Reuter.

Narayanan, 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.

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