

DOWN TO EARTH

Problems of Elderly Urbanites

By A S M Nurunnabi

"Day For The Elderly" was recently observed in this country as elsewhere under UN auspices. It was an occasion for sparring a thought for the plight of the elderly and for improving their lot in our country. By the blessings of modern medicine and by virtue of comparatively improved living conditions, old age is not considered a fixed stage in terms of years, but, since old age is an inevitability, various problems crop in course of living of the elderly in the midst of the young members of their families.

In some aspects, the problems of the elderly urbanites are somewhat different from those in rural areas. In modern times, an urban family, by and large, tends to be more individualistic with comparatively less feeling of attachment for the elderly in its midst. In such an urban setting, the young often hesitate to give shelter to the elderly, even if they happen to be their fathers and mothers, because their presence in the home interferes with their newly adopted life styles. This is general picture in the urban areas, especially among the upper middle class and middle class families.

This presents a contrast with the past social ethos under which caring for the elderly was always the tradition and it was expected of the young to care for the old until the day of his death. It is said that the way in which a nation treats its elderly reflects the level to which its society has evolved. Therefore, whatever be our past good record of care and service for the elderly, their neglect wherever it takes place nowadays represents a blot on our social mores.

The urbanites who follow a busy routine in active life face some uncertainties on reaching the age of retirement, the

portal to old age. Some try to keep up a busy schedule, like taking morning and evening walks, indulging in reading books in various libraries, and those who have the knack for writing spend their time happily writing on various subjects that interest them. Some, on the other hand, turn to religion or social service, where they find scope for exercising their faculties. There are, of course, some others who just idly pass their time.

The bane of old age is mainly loneliness, for in many cases, the set-up in which elderly people living with their families give and receive emotional and material support has gradually eroded. The family's role in ensuring the care and well-being of the elderly is important. However, urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation have contributed to the break-up of the extended family system. Households, formerly comprising more than one family, have been split up into a number of small families living in their own apartments, often a long way apart. As families become smaller and women participate increasingly in the workforce, the support traditionally provided to the elderly is being lost.

Sons and daughters of many affluent families, leaving their parents behind, go abroad for studies or employment. Their long sojourn abroad creates a typical situation. In many homes, particularly of affluent families, only the old parents continue to live in this country. An old man, placed in such a situation, lamented that when we die, our bodies are kept in cold storage in hospital morgue till our children come from abroad to complete the funeral rites.

In the west, the institution of old age homes has developed where old persons repair

when their adult sons and daughters, on account of their family ethos, leave home and the parents are too old to look after themselves in their own homes. In our country, such institution of old age home is yet to take shape. Fortunately today's elderly here are not always without friends, and some are actively encouraged by their offspring to take a new life and new interests. In America, for instance, the state educational system encourages the elderly to return to institutions at subsidised rates to do all the things they never had the time for when young and too busy bringing up children. However, for the elderly here, this is just a far-off dream at present.

In old age, the need for medical attention is perhaps greater than ever. In Dhaka, the need is sought to be met by a non-official body named Prabir Hitaishi Sangha situated at Agargaon. With government grant they run a full-fledged medical clinic where treatment is available for old people at concessional charges.

Old age is as much a personal problem as a social one. Since we have no social security system, as in the west, life in old age here is subject to uncertainties both in economic and health terms. In such a situation, all possible community support, in the opinion of many, is called for to extenuate the helplessness of old age. Since the family is considered the basic building block of society, schemes should be introduced with a view to preserving and strengthening the traditional family system and encouraging families to care for the elderly. A policy is also necessary to keep elderly people physically and mentally fit for as long as possible so that they can maintain their normal daily activities and living arrangements.



Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina visited the fire victims at Mohammadpur in the city yesterday. — Star photo

NGOs seek way to raise sanitation coverage

By Staff Correspondent

Government officials and representatives of different non-government organisations (NGOs) will meet in the city today to discuss how to increase the national sanitation coverage by 15 per cent.

Under the programme, some 30 lakh hygienic latrines will be installed in the country to provide safe sanitation to half of the population by the year 1995.

The government will pay Taka 200 as subsidy for each of the latrines to be built, according to NGO sources.

Officials of the Public Health Engineering, NGO Bureau, Chairman of the NGO Forum For Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Dr Fazle Hasan Abed, Director of the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) Rashida K Chowdhury, Executive Director of Caritas Geoffrey S Pereira, Executive Director of Proshika Dr Kazi Farooque Ahmed, and Director of NGO Forum S M A Rashid will be

present at the meeting. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia had announced during the National Sanitation Week 1994 that sanitation coverage will be increased to 50 per cent.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, under the directive of the Prime Minister, announced allocation of Taka 50 crore for this.

According to government statistics, about 35 per cent of the people have access to safe sanitation.

Out of every 100 rural households, 30 have hygienic latrines. In the cities, 75 in every 100 households have those.

About 60 lakh village families still opt for open-air and the banks of the rivers and canals for defecation.

The water supply picture in the country is not that grim. Roughly, 96 per cent of the rural people have access to safe drinking water.

'Russian army on verge of collapse'

MOSCOW, Nov 18: The Russian army is in the worst condition of any army in the world and is on the verge of collapse, Defence Minister Pavel Grachev told parliament today, reports AFP.

"Not a single army in the world is in such a catastrophic state. I ask you to take this as a warning," Grachev said in a speech to the state Duma, or lower house.

"Currently only 40 per cent of the army has modern equipment by 2000 only 10 per cent of the troops will have modern equipment," he said.

"An army like this can keep going for six months, or a year, thanks to the enthusiasm of some," said Grachev, who is under intense pressure to resign over corruption scandals within the armed forces.

"We must frankly answer the question, is there any need for the army or not," he said.

At the start of next year, the army will have 1,917,000 men, almost a million less than two years ago, he said.

"These cuts have had dramatic social and psychological consequences," he said.

Pakistan slams Indian threats

ISLAMABAD, Nov 18: Pakistan yesterday slammed what it called Indian threats over Islamabad's support for Kashmir separatists, reports AFP.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman issued a statement here that expressed concern over a recent comment by Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs Rajesh Pilot on the Kashmir conflict.

The Pakistani ministry quoted Pilot as warning Pakistan there could be a "fight to the finish" over Kashmir.

The spokesman here said the most recent warning was the third "provocative" statement made by Pilot, and added that such threats "do not frighten the people of Pakistan."

Finnish parliament votes for EU membership

HELSINKI, Nov 18: The Finnish parliament voted today in favour of the country joining the European Union next year, the speaker of parliament said, reports Reuters.

He said 152 members of the 200-seat legislature voted for membership and 45 against. A two-thirds majority of those voting was needed to approve membership. One member was absent and one abstained. The speaker does not vote.

Finnis voted 56.9 per cent to 43.1 per cent for membership in an advisory referendum on October 16. Parliament had the final say but most members of parliament said they regarded the plebiscite as morally binding.

6 killed

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be immediately identified died on way to the DMCH. Police seized the vehicle but its driver managed to escape.

Police sent both the bodies to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

In another accident, Nurjahan, 50, was run over by a truck at Shantinagar crossing at about 7 in the morning. An auto-rickshaw driver Monir Hossain, 30, was hit by a truck while he was crossing the road at Mirpur section-1 at about 2 am. He died on the spot.

A truck knocked down one Mujibur Rahman, 30, at Farashganj at about 12.30 am. He died at DMCH early yesterday.

Abul Kalam, 22, a pedestrian, was run over by a truck near Tawki on Dhaka-Narayanganj road yesterday afternoon. The body was sent to DMCH for autopsy.

The Midnight File

Iran, Pakistan to press OIC for action against Serbs

TEHRAN, Nov 18: Iran said today that it and Pakistan were urging a 50-member grouping of Islamic nations to take action against a Serb onslaught against a UN safe area in Bosnia. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati and Pakistani counterpart Asef Ahmad Ali agreed Thursday to press the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) for action over the city of Bihać, a foreign ministry statement here said, reports AFP.

Islamic Jihad forms suicide battalion

BEIRUT, Nov 18: The leader of Islamic Jihad in Palestine, a deadly foe of Israel, was quoted Friday as announcing the formation of a suicide battalion for attacks on Israeli troops. The independent Arabic-language newspaper Al-Hayat said the group's leader Fathi al-Shuqqa made the announcement in an interview in Damascus, Syria, reports AP.

Reynolds' departure leaves peace efforts in limbo

DUBLIN, Ireland, Nov 18: Weeks after being hailed as a hero for helping bring about an IRA cease-fire, Prime Minister Albert Reynolds has resigned in a scandal over a priest accused of child molestation, left lawmakers stunned, the government facing a potentially tortuous road to repair, and prospects for the Northern Ireland peace process uncertain.

His departure Thursday left lawmakers stunned, the government facing a potentially tortuous road to repair, and prospects for the Northern Ireland peace process uncertain.

"In life... You can't win them all," a grim-looking Reynolds told a hushed parliament as lawmakers were about to take a no-confidence vote on his coalition government.

A judge whose appointment precipitated the crisis resigned several hours later. A few days ago his resignation might have saved the government, but by Thursday the damage was beyond repair and all parties agreed Reynolds was right to step down.

His voice breaking and close to tears, Reynolds told parliament the main achievement of his 22-month government was "the breakthrough to peace in Northern Ireland," and he was stepping down to keep negotiations from being derailed.

India-Ukraine accord on space cooperation

NEW DELHI, Nov 18: India and Ukraine have signed an agreement for enhancing space cooperation in the areas of remote sensing, communication, material processing in space and mutual use of ground facilities, official sources said here today, reports Xinhua.

The agreement, which was signed by India's Space Secretary Dr K Kasturirangan during his recent visit to Kiev, also provided for conducting joint research missions by sending scientific payloads in each other's spacecraft.

Nepal

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ist), predicted in an interview Friday. "Party Chairman Manmohan Adhikari, who is 72, will be our candidate for the prime minister."

Adhikari is a nephew of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, but their families have long followed different ideologies.

In addition to their proposed land reforms, the communists have benefited from widespread feuding in the Nepali Congress which pulled down Prime Minister Koirala's government and forced an election 18 months ahead of schedule.

Bihac

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of the no-fly zone to cover the airspace over Croatia's Serb-held Krajina enclave.

It was this loophole which enabled the first jet attacker to escape without any NATO action being taken.

UN and NATO commanders sought Croatian permission on Monday to put planes into Croatian airspace to war off attacks on Bihać.

Sarajevo radio said two planes took off from Udbina in Serb held Croatia and carried out the raid on Bihać town and its suburbs at 11:00 am (1000 GMT). It said there were many casualties in the attack.

The government-controlled BH press news agency in Sarajevo said three planes were involved and one of them dropped at least two cluster bombs on a district of Bihać called Luke.

It said another aircraft strafed the ground with machine gun fire, while a third directed the operation.

The Security Council on Thursday warned warring parties around Bihać to stop fighting, saying NATO aircraft might be sent in to counter any attacks on the town or on Bihać peacekeepers there.

"A terrible cycle of death has been brought to an end," he said. The IRA began a cease-fire on Sept. 1 and pro-British Protestant gunmen announced their won truce Oct. 13. Reynolds' departure paves the way for his Fianna Fail party, which has been a major player in the peace process, to elect a new leader and perhaps return to power in a new coalition.

Reynolds and his ministers submitted their resignations to President Mary Robinson Thursday afternoon. Reynolds said he was not asking for a general election.

The Labour Party withdrew from the governing coalition Wednesday over the appointment of former attorney general Harry Whelehan as president of Ireland's High Court. Labour was unsatisfied with Reynolds' explanation of why Whelehan's office had failed to act on an extradition warrant for a Catholic priest accused of molesting children.

Whelehan, sworn in as president of the High Court just three days earlier, announced Thursday that he too would resign despite the "unjust attacks" against him.

Labour opposed Whelehan, a conservative Catholic, because he failed for seven months to extradite the Rev. Brendan Smyth to Northern Ireland to face child molestation charges. Smyth eventually returned under orders from cardinal Cahal Daly and is serving a four-year sentence.

Irish and British ministers had been working for several months on a framework for inter-party talks in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin, the IRA's political partner, had just joined the mainstream debate.

4 Tamils

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Nadu state. They procured Bangladeshi passports from one Abdul Gani in Singapore in exchange of 2,800 Singapore dollars.

They said they went to Singapore last September and were staying there as illegal immigrants.

The arrested are: K Thanu Thappagam alias Maqbul Hossain (as written in passport), P Teja Karujan alias Maqbul Hossain, S Abbas Mandir alias Shajahan Mollah and R Naba Bharat Harkisan alias Delwar Hossain.

Arrested Indians

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lice prayed for a seven-day remand but the magistrate granted one-day remand for each for questioning.

The security personnel arrested Meena and Ashfaq Thursday evening at the entrance to Sangsad Bhaban. Meena was carrying a six-inch dagger in her bag.

Both the Indian nationals came to Dhaka last month and on Thursday they went to see parliament session.

A police source said late last night they could seize one of the two passports so far but were still looking for the other one.

Hamas

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the crowd reportedly started hurling rocks after police tried to dismantle loudspeakers.

A Hamas activist said the march was planned to be peaceful and was in solidarity with arrested members of the Islamic Jihad who were rounded up by the Palestine Liberation Organisation after attacks on Israeli soldiers.

"We call on the Palestinian Authority to calm down because we do not need a civil war," said the activist interviewed on Israel Radio.

The shooting began about 12:20 pm and continued for more than 40 minutes. Witnesses said police began shooting after one policeman was hit in the head with a stone.

The dead worshippers were identified as Hazen Dalu, 22, of Gaza City, and Hamdi Amawi, 19, of Shati refugee camp, according to officials at Shifa Hospital. The name of the dead policeman was not immediately available.



Joshi dead

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Joshi and praised his contribution to the armed forces.

The army has lost a far-sighted chief and the nation a selfless soldier," Sharma said in a statement issued by the presidential palace.

Joshi, who was commissioned in 1954 in the armoured corps, has been steering the army through a continuing period of transition following the breakup of the Soviet Union, which was India's premier military ally.

He was Director-General of Operations at a critical time when the Indian armed forces fought Tamil separatist guerrillas in Sri Lanka's northeast in 1987-90.

He commanded an armoured regiment in the 1971 conflict with Pakistan and served on staff with the United Nations emergency force in Gaza during 1961-62.

Joshi also served as India's military, naval and air advisor in the South Pacific region in 1973-76, and was concurrently accredited to Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga.

He was a recipient of the Param Vishisht Seva Medal for distinguished service of the most exceptional order.

FFs urge MPs

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added. His suggestions also include taking the oath of neutrality from the President by the chiefs of Army and BDR and the IGP.

He strongly criticised foreign mediation on a national issue and requested the political leaders to politely decline "all foreign interventions, including that of Sir Ninian" in resolving the crisis.

Freedom fighters Nayeem Jahangir, Fateh Chowdhury, Capt (ret'd) Nurul Huda, Maj (ret'd) Syed Mizanur Rahman, Maj (ret'd) Syed Munir Rahman, Engr Safullah and Alhaj Khaled Hossain were present at the press conference.

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3 Western envoys

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during their meetings, requested the Opposition leader not to go ahead with planned en masse resignation by the Opposition members of the Parliament.

The British High Commissioner and the US Ambassador also met the Commonwealth Secretary General's envoy Sir Ninian Stephen at the state guest house Meghna and stayed with him for some time.

The Opposition's latest proposal on caretaker government issue was sent to the ruling party yesterday. Dr Mosef Anafu, an aide to Sir Ninian, handed over the written proposal of the Opposition to Deputy Leader of Parliament Prof A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday morning.

The ruling party is likely to discuss the Opposition proposal sometime today before giving any reaction to it.

UNB adds: BNP Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukdar reiterated that solution to the present political crisis must be worked out within the framework of the country's Constitution.

50 French army advisers working in Algeria?

PARIS, Nov 18: France has about 50 military advisers working secretly in Algeria to support helicopter crews fighting Muslim insurgents, a French magazine reported on Thursday, quoting French intelligence sources, reports Reuters.

The weekly VSD said the advisers — technicians and pilots — were on temporary leave from the army and were on the payroll of French arms firms, earning 50,000 to 150,000 francs (10,000 US dollar to 30,000 US dollar) per month.

It said a subsidiary of French state firm Aerospatiale was refitting 37 Soviet-made Mi-24 hind helicopter gunships with night vision devices, thermal sensors and Laser-guided firing systems and Algerian pilots were being trained at France's military helicopter school.

Foreign Minister Alain Juppé flatly denied on Wednesday that France was providing military aid to Algeria, despite growing reports of the sale and upgrading of military helicopters.

Asked about any possibility of a solution without keeping the Prime Minister in the interim government, Talukdar said, "The incumbent Prime Minister must be there and that is our proposal."

When his attention was drawn to press reports that BNP may amend the Constitution for a caretaker government to conduct polls, he said, "It is absolutely a false propaganda...There was nothing like that in our proposal."

He denied the report of inclusion of a "technocrat" minister in the BNP proposal made on November 13.

Talukdar said BNP had submitted a proposal to Commonwealth envoy Sir Ninian on October 29 and some amendments were made to it in the light of the government-Opposition discussion. BNP submitted the amended proposal to Sir Ninian on November 13.

Opposition launches unlicensed TV station in Taiwan

TAIPEI (Taiwan), Nov 18: Two weeks before local elections, Taiwan's largest opposition party began operating an unlicensed television station Friday to protest what it called a government monopoly of the airwaves, reports AP.

The Democratic Progressive Party said the New Taiwan Television Station began airing programmes in the Taipei area Friday and hopes to cover central and southern Taiwan by the end of the month.

"As a responsible political party, we are obliged to seize back rights which have been deprived us," a party statement said.

Government spokesman Jason Hu said authorities will close the station when its clandestine transmitter is located.

The government has denied allegations of media monopoly and urged the new station to apply for a license before broadcasting.

At present, all three television networks are government-controlled, and opposition politicians say the networks' programmes favour the ruling Nationalist Party's candidates.

To promote democracy, the government is screening applications for a new television station, which may start broadcasting in 1996.

Shih Ming-teh, chairman of the DPP, said the new illegal station will air nine hours of programmes daily focusing on campaigns for the December 3 elections that include Taiwan's provincial governor and the mayors of Taipei and Kaohsiung cities.

But he said the party will shift the station's operation to private companies after the elections.



Anjali Kapur, the 24-year-old lawyer who posed nude for a pin-up magazine and sparked a storm in the Indian capital's legal community, poses for picture November 10 in New Delhi. The Delhi Bar Association has demanded that her lawyer's license be revoked saying her conduct was unbefitting of the legal profession. — AFP photo

Peasants agony mounts

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other party to the disputes — by far more numerous — is the vast army of landless farmers who obtain orders from the government for settlement on certain char areas — usually deemed Khas or public land — and cultivate the newly risen tracts.

But in most cases the more privileged *jotedars* defy the government's settlement orders and snatch away the crops from the farmers on the plea of their claimed ownership. And, for this, they turn to the *lathials* and armed hooligans.

Absence of proper border demarcation of the coastal districts, where accretion of land in char areas is a normal annual phenomenon, is yet another reason leading to bloody disputes over ownership.

District administrations concerned have little coordination among themselves, often issuing overlapping orders of settlement which

fuel bitter wars of attrition between private armies.

A huge number of title suits filed by rival claimants of the chars remain pending in the courts for years. These unsettled litigations also contribute to the spread of violence.

Observers maintain that adequate and appropriate action by the government is the crying need of the hour to bring an end to this seasonal violence in the coastal land once for all. They suggest immediate and proper demarcation of district borders, setting up of police camps in the troubled areas, firm action against the *lathials* and other miscreants and constant vigil by the law enforcing authorities, especially during the harvesting season.

"Delay in adopting these measures will only cause unfortunate eventualities while the poor farmers will continue to suffer and the problem will keep getting worse," observers said.