

# DOWN TO EARTH

## Enriching City's Natural Beauty

By A S M Nurunabi

The need for saving the Dhaka city from worsening environmental situation has become urgent. In the process of unplanned growth of the city, we have almost lost many traces of greenery and pools of clear water areas. The city once prided itself on its large open spaces, particularly in the Ramna area. In summer when its numerous *krisnachura* trees were in bloom, the entire area was filled with a riot of colour, as if on fire. With most of these trees gone — victims of urban development — the vacant landscape elicits nostalgic memories in old timers. In winter also the verdant area used to acquire a singular appeal as a mild nip air merged with bright sunshine.

From the point of view of physical location, Dhaka city is an ideal place. The elements of its natural beauty consist in the river Buriganga in the south and the west and girdles of trees and numerous water areas. The city is so fertile that flower trees grow here on their own without much care. But unfortunately in the process of growth of the city, we have failed to take full advantage of these elements. The master plan for the city approved in 1960 met with various complications in the process of its implementation. The riverside natural beauty has been obliterated as if consciously. In the said master plan, provision was made for parks and open spaces with a total area of two hundred nine-tenths acres. But it has not been possible to implement even one-tenth of this provision. Rather than the expansion of the city, open parks and parks have been threatened with extinction. On the river side, there was once a park called Ladies Park. Various cultural functions used to be held here. Now this park is a thing of the past. On the river bank, the master plan provided for an open space extending over an area of 23 acres. In its place, a hawkers' market had grown up in the seventies. It was also proposed that on the

two sides of Dholai Khal, clusters of green trees will be planted. In that plan, provision was made for keeping an open space measuring eightythree acres. And in its midst it was contemplated to create a lake full of its brim with clear water and in which there will be rows of boats. In place of that dream, we have now a dingy area on Dholai Khal. In the fifties, many cultural functions used to be held in the Bahadur Shah Park. There was once a time when the Dhooophola Maidan in Ganderia had beautiful green trees. Now those trees have been swept clean and in their place have sprouted rows of shops. In this way the green belt of the city has been destroyed to give shape to the present structure of the city.

The old part of the city also was not without its open spaces. Though they were few in number, they seemed to meet the needs of that time, considering the low density of population in the past. The problem of scarcity of open spaces is compounded by the evergrowing propensity of political parties and organisations to use the limited spaces available for their meetings, gatherings and other action programmes like sit-ins. For such purposes, the most favoured spots are the places in front of the Press Club, Baitul Mukarram Square, Shapla Chattar and the road-land in front of the Dhaka University Teachers Students Centre.

The huge number of rickshaws plying in the city worsens the situation when the broad road areas are frequently used as venues for public meetings. Half the Tophkhana Road remained closed almost daily when such meetings are held, creating problems for traffic of all descriptions and causing nasty jams for long hours.

In every city of the river banks are planned to add natural beauty to the city, turning them into centres of entertainment but here in this city the Buriganga has been abandoned as a beauty spot. Probably the greatest threat to

the environment of the city is posed by the polluted river waters in which industrial wastes from nearby tanneries and other factories are thrown willy nilly. The pollution of the river has reached such a stage that its fish resources have been completely obliterated. Even during the British period, the river side known as Buckland Bund was beautified with greenery. Even during the Pakistani period, traces of that beauty remained. As a waterway also, the river has also lost much of its navigability.

Even now, the city contains some islands of greenery. Every effort may be made to preserve them. There are tremendous possibilities for expansion and development of the existing lakes like Crescent Lake, Ramna Lake, Gulshan Lake and Dhanamandi Lake, which attract hundreds of visitors every day.

What can be done to improve the existing situation? Some people think that in the existing state of things there may be limited scope for improvement even if the town planners may try for it. The old areas of Dhaka are in greater need for open spaces. There is a project for shifting the Dhaka Central Jail to a more spacious site near Shalipur in Gazipur district. When that project is implemented quite a big area in the heart of old Dhaka will be available. It is for the town planners to consider whether instead of utilising that area for commercial or residential complex, which will further add to the existing congestion, the area could be used for a properly laid-out public park with ancillary facilities. This may largely compensate for the loss that has already taken place of other open spaces in the old part of the city.

What is more important immediately according to some people, is to ensure adoption of appropriate measures to keep the existing open spaces and lakes free from encroachments and also to remain vigilant that the atmosphere in these areas is not vitiated in any manner.



Agitated jute and textile mills workers damaging a minibus at Tophkhana Road in the city during a rally in support of their demands yesterday. — Star photo

## Jute, cotton mills workers threaten barricade, strike

Jute and cotton mills workers at a rally in Dhaka yesterday warned of a road-rail barricade tomorrow and a 72-hour strike beginning on the day if wage commission award for workers is not implemented in private mills by today, reports UNB.

The Patkal Sramik Karmachari Sangram Parishad, Private Jute Mills CBA Coordination Committee, Bangladesh Suta-Bastrakal Sramik Karmachari Federation, Bastra Shilpa Sramik League and Private Cotton-Textile Mills CBA Coordination Council jointly organised the rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

They demanded that the wage commission award be implemented for private jute, cotton and textile mills workers and move for privatising the Latif Bawani, UMC Hafiz and Gol Ahmed jute mills be stopped.

Presided over by joint convener of the Patkal Sramik Karmachari Sangram Council Shahidullah Chowdhury, the rally was addressed, among others, by labour leaders Abul Bashar, Abdul Aziz Chistee, Iqbal Majumdar and K Alam Belal.

## No new settlement in West Bank: Rabin

EREZ CROSSING (Gaza Strip), Jan 20: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sought to reassure PLO leader Yasser Arafat during a summit Thursday that Israel was not undertaking a new settlement building campaign in the occupied West Bank, reports AP.

After the two-hour meeting at this crossing point into the Palestinian self-rule area, Arafat indicated he was not entirely content with the Israeli position on settlements that have been the focus of rising tensions.

"Somewhere in between," Arafat said when asked if he was satisfied by Rabin's assurances.

Rabin also stressed the Israeli demand that the self-rule government make a real effort to fight attacks by Islamic opponents of the accord.

"We are doing all our best," Arafat said. "I can understand your need for security and our need for what has been agreed on. We have to continue coordination and cooperation in all fields."

The summit comes amidst a souring of Israel-Palestinian relations over stalled attempts to expand autonomy beyond the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho, where the

PLO took control last May.

Israel has grown disenchanted with the idea of handing over more territory after a wave of attacks by Islamic extremists opposed to the plan left 33 Israelis dead since October 1.

Palestinians accuse Israel of making a last-ditch attempt to grab land with a campaign by Jewish settlers to expand their communities in the West Bank. With government approval, more than 5,000 new housing units were reportedly scheduled for completion in the West Bank in 1994-1995.

Israel's Cabinet is expected to make a decision of future settlement activity at a meeting Sunday.

## Kobe

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Friday morning, the dogs had located 13 people. Twelve were already dead and the other died in hospital, Swiss team leaders said.

An aftershock with a magnitude of 3.6 jolted this city on Friday. Seismologists described it as one of the strongest of the more than 800 aftershocks recorded since Tuesday's devastating quake.

There were no reports of further damage or casualties, but the new shaking served as a further reminder of the vulnerability of this once-prosperous city, now struggling to survive without adequate water, food, fuel and electricity.

Three days after the quake 110,000 households remained without power and nearly 850,000 homes still had no natural gas.

## Top Sikh militant held in India

NEW DELHI, Jan 20: Indian police have arrested a top Sikh militant who allegedly masterminded a car bomb blast outside the headquarters of the ruling Congress (I) Party which killed nine people, police said here today, reports AFP.

Deepak, a "de facto" chief of the Khalistan Liberation Force, was arrested at New Delhi's Indra Gandhi International Airport soon after he arrived from Frankfurt on Thursday, senior police commissioners Nikhil Kumar said.

He was travelling with a false passport and carried a cyanide capsule, Kumar said.

## A 'sick child' for over 100 yrs

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Government of Pakistan. With the new investor, the history of railway is one of utter negligence and deprivation. Already infested with operational drawbacks and physical impediments and the severe stresses of the World War II, the railway received no attention for rehabilitation or repairs.

Besides, the sick child was slowly pushed into the time having to carry an enormous burden of unprofessional planning.

According to a retired railway engineer who served in the East Bengal Railway at the time, the backlog of repairs accumulated so rapidly that at one point all hopes were given up.

"Lack of funds especially foreign exchange and a laissez-faire attitude of the decision-makers contributed largely to this adverse situation," he said. On 1 February, 1961 East Bengal Railway was named Pakistan Eastern Railway. A year later, in 1962, to the relief of

passenger carriages, 1484 units of freight wagons, 140 units of locomotives and 20 marine craft were badly damaged. About 1300 employees including some experienced officers and skilled workers were killed in the war of liberation.

For the railway, it was a start almost from the scratch. All investment made on BR for a long time after the independence had to be an account of replacement of assets damaged in the war.

To add to the misery, natural calamities such as floods and erosion affected the infrastructure... not to mention hartals, civil commotions, which often inflict extensive damage to the railway property draining valuable funds.

Today, BR has got stuck in a steam-age management and needs massive government subsidy every year. The sick child is here, more than hundred years old, throwing its arms and legs about and crying for help.

## The Midnight File

### French jet crash kills 10

PARIS, Jan 20: An executive jet crashed shortly after takeoff from Le Bourget Airport north of Paris on Friday, killing all 10 people on board, authorities said. The Mystere Falcon 20 of the company Leadair, with seven passengers and a three-member crew, was taking off when one engine caught fire, said French aviation officials, reports AP.

## Foreign ministry

From Page 1 Col 2

circle as the Morshed Committee, originally comprised six other members.

They are: former ambassador Justice Maksumul Hakim, former ambassador Abdul Momen, former ambassador and cabinet secretary Mohammad Siddiqur Rahman, former foreign secretary and ambassador Nazrul Islam, former secretary Nurul Hussain Khan and Abdul Momen Chowdhury Additional foreign secretary overseeing economic affairs, who is the member-secretary of the special committee.

The Committee is learnt to have co-opted some important Secretaries of the government. Two sub-committees have also been set up. One sub-committee headed by Nazrul Islam is dealing extensively with the re-organisation of the Foreign Ministry (Headquarters) and the other sub-committee led by Siddiqur Rahman is looking after the re-organisation of the foreign missions.

A source concerned said, "The exercise is meant to make the Foreign Ministry more competent to deal with the fast changing world scenario, face the new challenges and make every effort to seize investment opportunities. Essentially it would be changes in the organon, not changes in personnel."

The source also said the committee might recommend an integrated foreign policy approach where the Foreign Ministry and the mission heads will also control the different wings in their respective missions directly. Presently, officers in different wings like economic, commerce, labour and press are posted and controlled by the respective ministries.

The special committee will also have to handle the delicate task of bringing a harmony about posting of officials from other ministries as many veterans in the Foreign Ministry feel that line ministries' work is better done by the foreign service cadre officials with expertise as a matter of routine. Officials of the other ministries however, insist on expertise from their own ministries.

Besides suggesting changes in organon and personnel, the committee will try to work out the most important aspects of revamping the missions and gearing up the entire Foreign Ministry towards the country's economic interests.

Thrust towards economic diplomacy to get the maximum benefit from the fast competing business world of today would have to be the essence of a real foreign ministry reform," said a retired diplomat. Creating better investment and trading opportunities for the nation is now the over-riding factor in world diplomacy, he added.

The special committee has been asked to prepare its report within three months from its first meeting. The government may grant an extension of time if required. The Morshed Committee first sat on November 17 to finalise the modus operandi. According to the government notification, the committee will continue to be functional for seven months from the date of its first meeting.

The special committee which has a wide range of responsibility has been given five terms of reference by a government gazette notification.

The first operating reference states that the committee should review the entire gamut of the present methods and nature of the functioning of the Foreign Ministry against the backdrop of current international perspective keeping the national interest in mind. The committee has been asked to recommend all necessary changes for re-organisation and restructuring of the ministry.

The second term calls for making recommendations on the functioning of the overseas missions in the light of changed global scenario giving maximum emphasis on the country's commercial and economic investment opportunities. A comprehensive review of the structure and composition of personnel has also been referred to.

The third reference has called for a review of the geographical location of the existing missions and their territorial jurisdiction. The Committee has been asked to suggest any necessary relocation of missions, upgrading or downgrading of the existing missions, closure of the existing missions and suggestions for opening new missions, if it felt necessary. Presently, Bangladesh has 45 missions in operation.

Mentionably, some missions cover more than one country and several important territories remain outside any mission's real jurisdiction. There are also instances where it is 'inconvenient' to cover the territorial jurisdiction from the location of an existing mission.

The fourth terms of reference has called for recommending any required changes in the structure and composition of personnel in the overseas missions.

The committee, in its fifth and last term of reference has been asked to seek suggestions, and opinions whenever necessary from any ministry, government officials or any citizen.

The Special Committee, however, has been asked to discuss extensively with the Foreign Minister before finalisation of its report. The committee is to hand over the final report to the Prime Minister.

## Hasina: Our demand is clear

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Awami League chief said, each member had signed his own resignation letter individually and later submitted those to the Speaker.

"I myself handed over my own resignation letter to the Speaker," she said, adding it is not a matter of accepting or rejecting. "It is done."

Asked about the High Court's ruling on the resignation, Hasina said since it is the matter of the High Court, she would not make any comment.

On the coming session of Parliament, Hasina said the 'sudden' summoning of Parliament would make the situation more difficult. "The President usually summons the session 15 days ahead. I don't know why it has been called so hastily this time."

Asked if she received any formal reply from the government side to her latest proposal on a caretaker government, Hasina said: "No, I've not."

"To a question about any negotiation with the government, Hasina said: "I don't have any knowledge about it. What negotiations? What understanding? The Prime Minister herself doesn't want any understanding and solution."

Asked about the possibility of a summit with the Prime Minister, she replied: "We meet each other at different receptions or wedding ceremonies. But what is the use of it until the Prime Minister accepts our demand in principle."

Declining to comment on a reported government move for an interim government bill, Hasina said it will not be surprising if the ruling party presents any such bill.

"She said this government has no responsibility, efficiency and transparency. They do not want to solve the problem and all their moves are basically insincere merely to hoodwink people and gain their own political end."

About the Prime Minister's recent public speeches on the

Opposition demand and agitation, Hasina said the Prime Minister has been making 'indecorous' statements against the Opposition. Before resignation she said the Prime Minister alleged in advance that the Opposition would resort to destructive activities.

"But the Opposition did not go for that. Rather we followed constitutional means and made our highest sacrifice by giving up our membership when we found Parliament ineffective in protecting people's interest," she said.

Hasina said: "We do not want conflict or confrontation, but it is the Prime Minister who is forcing us to come out on the street. And we will do it appropriately."

Hasina said the Opposition's programmes are aimed at protecting the people's interest and ensuring genuine development in a stable political condition.

She said a half-day hartal has been called in the capital on January 24 to protest the unusual price-hike of essentials, including rice, pulses and oil, and the country-wide dawn-to-dusk hartal on January 25 for a caretaker government to ensure people's voting rights and political stability.

## Two mugged at Cantonment

By Staff Correspondent

Wives of two army officers were robbed of their gold ornaments in the Dhaka Cantonment's Shaheed Mainul Road, some 50 yards off the Prime Minister's house, yesterday afternoon.

The two women, on their way back home from Kachukhet Bazar, by a rickshaw, were waylaid by muggers who snatched their gold chains and bangles.

One of the victims, Meherunnessa lodged a case with the Cantonment police. However, no arrest was made till filing of this report midnight last night.

Hasina said that before the Ramadan, the price of rice shot up to Tk 20 per kilo this season. But the Prime Minister earlier had told the people that her government would export rice and at the same time ensure its domestic supply at cheaper rates.

"But the situation is completely reverse. The government has completely failed to check the price spiral of essentials that is now beyond the buying capacity of the commonman."

When her attention was drawn to the hartal on the day when an international investment conference is to be held in Dhaka, Hasina said the organisers did not inform the Opposition beforehand about the conference. She, however, added the hartal would not affect the conference.

"We're not against investment. We love this country. We want investment and the aim of our agitation is to attain economic development in a sound political system."

Responding to statements by different chambers against hartals, Hasina urged the business community to tell the Prime Minister to accept the Opposition demand.

"Power does not lie with us... Request those who are in power," she said. "There will be no programmes the moment the people's demands are met."

Contradicting the views that hartals destroy economy, Hasina wanted to know why investment has not been possible in last three and half years when there was no opposition-sponsored hartal.

In last four years, comprising 1460 days of the BNP government, only five full-day and some 10 half-day hartals were called by the Opposition. "What happened to the rest 1445 days? The people want to know the volume of investment and development achieved during this period," the Awami League President said.

**কাল মহানায়ক, কিংবদন্তী পুরুষ**  
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