

SAVE DHAKA

URBANISATION & HOUSING: PART 4

Of unplanned markets and roadside bazaars

My Masud Hasan Khan
Once Dhaka was known as the city with "bayanno bazar and teppanno golf" (52 markets and 53 alleys).

The name reflected thriving economic activities that started from the time of the Mughal era and continued even after the capital of Bengal was shifted elsewhere — Murshidabad and later, to Calcutta by the British.

Wars, natural disasters and man-made famines — Dhaka withstood all and its economic pulse went on beating — though sometimes very feebly — because the city was the gateway to a rich hinterland for unlimited raw materials.

Different neighbourhoods such as Chawkbazar, Lakhshimbazar, Tantibazar and Shakhbarbazar with the affluence of bazaar in their names still sparkle with the old trading glory of Dhaka.

In the course of history, the marketplaces of Dhaka have shifted northward with the sprawl of the city upto Tongi. Some 90 plus marketplaces in the modern-day Dhaka, both supermarkets and kutchas bazaar, are suffering from poor management and the absence of civic facilities, with the city fathers at a loss.

The condition of 29 supermarkets, 22 kutchas bazaar and another 11 supermarket-kutchas bazaar continue to deteriorate as these vital urban institutions are increasingly being taken over by extortionists and 'protection-racketeers'.

The activities of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) have become limited to the extent of allocating shops at a high

'salami' (deposit) and collecting revenue.

Maintenance of the marketplaces, and utility services such as water, power and gas, has become the headache of the individual shop owner, or their representative market committees.

The DCC earns about Taka five crore every year from the city markets. This annual collection does not include the unspecified amount of salami collected prior to allocation of shops in newly built markets.

Close-set shops, rancid atmosphere and traffic congestion are just some of the acute problems that the city managers have managed to overlook for too long, alleged the shop owners.

In addition, there are vendors, hawkers, peddlers, thieves, pickpockets and neighbourhood policemen, all allegedly targeting the buyer.

Besides the supermarkets and kutchas bazaar, there are 14 road-side kitchen markets, according to the DCC. The condition of the street-side bazaar is even worse, with little or no attention paid to those by the DCC.

Shop owners readily admit the inconveniences being caused to shoppers, but claim there is little they can do as they do not own the markets.

Big markets either belong to the DCC or private owners, they point out.

DCC officials, on the other hand, say that if the private owners do not maintain their markets, they are helpless.

Shop owners, interviewed by The Daily Star, said some 12,000 small and big shops in New Market-Gausia-Elephant Road is one such victim. There are many others where urgent attention is required.

Utility maintenance of these markets has become uncontrollable, they say, mainly because of the mushroom growth of shops in Gausia, Chandni Chawk, Noor and Chitria markets.

Now, faced with frequent power failures, almost all the shops have to have small generators while consortiums maintain their private toilets.

DCC sources said there is no 'Building Code' that provides directions to the market owners on how much space they have to have for parking facilities or how many toilets they should have in their markets.

"There is a serious flaw in our town planning," commented Amir Hossain Khan, a leader of the Bangladesh Federation of Shop Owners' Association (BFSOA).

Talking to The Daily Star, he said that proposals made by the BFSOA for resolving the city market problems were ignored.

"We suggested to the government that new markets can be built where the hawkers can be rehabilitated," he said, acknowledging the positive role of the vendors in Dhaka's informal sector.

The shop owners even went on suggesting that the city markets should be closed on a certain day to allow the hawkers do their business, said a disappointed Khan, adding "Who listens to your suggestions?"

The hawkers exploit their political and economic powers, said a senior police official who declined to be named. "This is a question of their survival... anyone who underestimates it is sure to lose his footing," he added.

Sources told this correspondent that racketeering involving the city markets has reached such a height that every vendor's stool, every chawki and every shop is a 'source' of thousands of Taka every year.

The money usually goes through secret channels and even reaches the high-ups in the administration and politics, the sources claimed.

The poor should get easy access to credit: Saifur

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman yesterday said government's economic policy objective is to involve all the people in productive sectors for alleviating poverty, reports UNB.

In this regard, he described education and credit as the main instruments to empower people, particularly the poor and women, in their fight against poverty.

"We have to keep it in mind that 27 per cent of the total population is still in absolute poverty, they must be uplifted," Rahman said, asserting that credit should be made available to them without collateral.

"Credit is the inherent right of a poor... you can trust the poor of this country, they are free from the propensity for non-payment of loan," the Finance Minister said inaugurating a workshop on credit programme.

The Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), a government-run lending agency, arranged the day-long workshop at the NEC auditorium to discuss the role of its credit programme in alleviating poverty.

The PKSF distributes loans through associate non-governmental organisations. It charges 3-4.5 per cent interest on its loans to NGOs who lend at a rate of 10-15 per cent.

While speaking on credit **Woman, minor girl raped in city**

By DMCH Correspondent
A woman and a minor girl were reportedly raped at Mohammadpur and Agargaon in the city yesterday and Friday.

A minor girl, aged 7, was reportedly raped by an unidentified youth near the flood protection embankment under Mohammadpur police station yesterday afternoon.

In another incident, a 20-year-old woman was gang raped by three young men.

The victim, a garments worker, was also admitted to the DMCH.

The woman alleged that the three young men called her from her slum at Agargaon at about 7 pm Friday and forcibly took her to the old airport area where she was raped.

facilities for the poor, the Finance Minister noted with frustration that there was no effective mechanism in the hand of government to channel fund to the rural poor.

"The most difficult thing I faced in credit extension is absence of a mechanism that can deliver without transaction cost," Rahman said, recognising Krishi Bank's failure in extending credit to the rural poor.

He also admitted his failure in changing the attitude of the commercial banks who still prefer to collateral-based banking.

"He informed the audience that kindergarten type system would be introduced in country's all the 53,000 primary schools for the kids and over 50,000 new woman teachers be employed for the purpose.

Fire brigade
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Persons concerned to utilise the services of the Fire Brigade in mitigating the sufferings of the city people.

Talking to The Daily Star, a Fire Brigade official said they would offer their services only to those areas where WASA has been failing to supply water.

"Our service is only for common people who are deprived to water," he said. The Fire Brigade would volunteer its services only when its vehicles would be available, he added.

SAARC standing body considers 23-pt agenda

NEW DELHI, Apr 29: The SAARC Standing Committee, made up by the foreign secretaries of the member states, today extended its session till tomorrow to enable the drafting committee to finalise the report, says BSS.

The foreign secretaries in their evening session under the chairmanship of India's Foreign Secretary Salman Haider considered all the 23 agenda items and decided to meet again tomorrow to consider the report being finalised by the drafting committee.

The report of the standing committee will be submitted to the foreign ministers who will begin their two-day session tomorrow.

All the foreign secretaries of the member countries have attended the session.

N'ganj clash
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Bhutto was shot in his chest and died instantly. Kabir succumbed to his bullet wound at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) later. Both the bodies were sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy, added our DMCH correspondent.

Two of the injured — one a woman — were rushed to the capital. But their whereabouts could not be known till the filing of this report at 10 pm.

In the first four months of this year at least nine people were killed and over 100 injured in clashes, mostly political, in different parts of the district.

MP's son killed
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As soon as the news of Masud's death spread, armed youths rushed to the area where Habibullah lived. They stormed the house of Abdul Alim Mridha, MP from Narsingdi-5. They locked the Mridha family inside the house and set it on fire.

Mridha, at the time, was attending the BNP divisional conference in the capital.

Sources said that the armed group prevented fire service personnel from entering the area. When police intervened, they were also subjected to gunshots, cracker explosions and stone throwing.

An ASP somehow broke a window of the blazing house of Mridha, where his mother, wife, children and others of the house had been trapped, and rescued them, one by one.

Soon after, the armed group turned on the houses of other supporters of Mridha.

As the body of Masud was being taken back home from the hospital, violent protests left two unidentified persons bullet-hit in Bajirmor area.

Tension gripped Narsingdi town where armed police from Dhaka have been deployed.

The district administration held an urgent meeting later in the evening to maintain peace in the town.

The Midnight File

Blasts rock Kashmir capital

SRINAGAR, Apr 29: Two powerful explosions blamed on Muslim guerrillas rocked India's summer capital of Kashmir before dawn today, injuring six people and damaging scores of buildings, police said. The first blast virtually razed a building housing two Indian banks in the commercial and residential area of Batmaloo. A second blast occurred minutes later near the residence of a retired senior police officer, the police said, reports AFP.

3 die in Karachi blast

KARACHI, Apr 29: At least three people were killed and two injured when a bomb exploded in violence-plagued Karachi today, while a policeman was shot dead in another troubled city in this province, police said. The explosion occurred in the eastern Baldia sector of the port city, a police official said, adding that the authorities had no immediate clue about who might have carried out the bombing or of the motive behind it, reports AFP.

Indo-Pak talks on Kashmir during Delhi summit

NEW DELHI, Apr 29: Arch-rivals India and Pakistan will hold talks on Kashmir when their leaders meet at next week's summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), officials said here today, reports AFP.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Asif Ali on his arrival here today for the SAARC summit said the two sides will hold bilateral talks on Kashmir.

"Kashmir is on top of our agenda," Ali said of a scheduled meeting between Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and Pakistani President Farooq Leghari at the three-day SAARC summit which begins here Tuesday.

Since the forum bans discussions on bilateral issues, Rao and Leghari would raise the thorny topic at the summit of the SAARC, which comprises India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Maldives, Ali said.

"The summit restricts us to raise only issues of regional and common benefit... in bilateral talks such restraints do not exist," said Ali, who is here to attend a ministerial conference which will forge the agenda for the summit.

Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will not attend the New Delhi summit because of her preoccupation with the country's upcoming federal budget, Ali said.

"Along with Kashmir, we also want to focus on other major irritants affecting relations between the two countries, Kashmir is the foremost issue which has to be settled before the two nations could go on to other issues," he said.

Face electoral battle

From Page 1
probe the fertiliser scandal, the Prime Minister assured that no one will be spared.

"I have no scope of showing any mercy to anyone. None of those responsible will be allowed to go unpunished, even if he is from my party," she said and warned: "Big or small, they must face the consequences."

Refuting the charges of politicising fertiliser distribution, the BNP chairperson said: "We have always seen to the interests of the country."

The 3rd divisional conference of the ruling party was also addressed by Deputy Leader of the House Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury, BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister Abdul Salam Talukder, Chief Whip Khandker Delwar Hossain, State Minister for Science and Technology M A Mannan, State Minister for Forest and Environment Goyeshwar Roy, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Prof Jahannara Begum, Saiauddin Ahmed MP, Barrister Nazmul Huda MP and Shahjahan Seraj.

More than 80 leaders of the party's district, thana and union committees under the Dhaka division also spoke at the conference chaired by the Conference Preparatory Committee Chairman and Food Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

Earlier in the morning, Begum Zia inaugurated the day-long moot, the third such gathering, attended by about 7,000 ruling party leaders from the grassroots to central levels.

BNP div conference

From Page 1
thana and union units of the BNP gathered at the PM's Hare Road office for the Dhaka Divisional Conference of the party.

Sixty-seven of them spoke in the day-long conference which was also addressed by central leaders.

The mufassil leaders also alleged that because of personal clashes among the leaders, more than one committee continue in many districts and thana as affecting party activities.

Rafiquzzaman denied permission to leave country
By Court Correspondent

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate on Tuesday last denied permission to leave the country to Dr M Rafiquzzaman, arrested earlier by the Anti-Corruption Bureau in connection with the defalcation of a large bank loan.

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) ruled that the accused cannot be given permission to leave the country at this stage since the case is under initial investigation and the allegations against him are serious.

Noting the prosecution contention that the accused would not return if allowed to leave the country, a fact which would affect the judicial proceedings, the court observed the argument seemed logical.

The court, however, asked the investigation officer (IO) to report by May 6 next the possibility of allowing the accused to substitute his presence by a designated agent at subsequent court hearings under Section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Code, as sought by the defence lawyer.

Earlier, the defence counsel submitted that his client, who is a professor at a university in the United States, urgently needed to go abroad, and assured that he would come back. The client's state of health was also cited as a ground. But the prosecution lawyer asserted that the accused would not return if allowed to leave the country. He also noted that Rafiquzzaman holds a foreign passport.

Earlier, Begum Zia inaugurated the closed-door conference at 10 am in the morning by setting free two pigeons and hoisting party flag. BNP Secretary General Abdul Salam Talukder, Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury, Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Shalauddin Ahmed MP, Nazmul Huda, Chowdhury Tanvir Ahmed Siddiqi, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yousuf, Jahannara Begum, Prof M A Mannan, Shahjahan Siraj and a number of other leaders spoke at the conference.

Convener of the conference preparatory committee Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan chaired the meeting.

At about 9-15 pm, member secretary of the preparatory committee, Akmal Ibne Yousuf held a press briefing at the party central office. The outcome of the conference would be made known tomorrow," he said.

He said out of 6,242 delegates, some 6,196 attended the conference.

IU closed

From Page 1
Meanwhile, three seriously injured students, who were hospitalised Friday night, were sent to Dhaka today for better treatment.

On Friday, a guardian of an admission seeker was killed and three students were seriously injured in bomb blasts during a clash between the activists of the Islami Chhatra Shibir and the Jatiyatadabi Chhatra Dal on the campus.

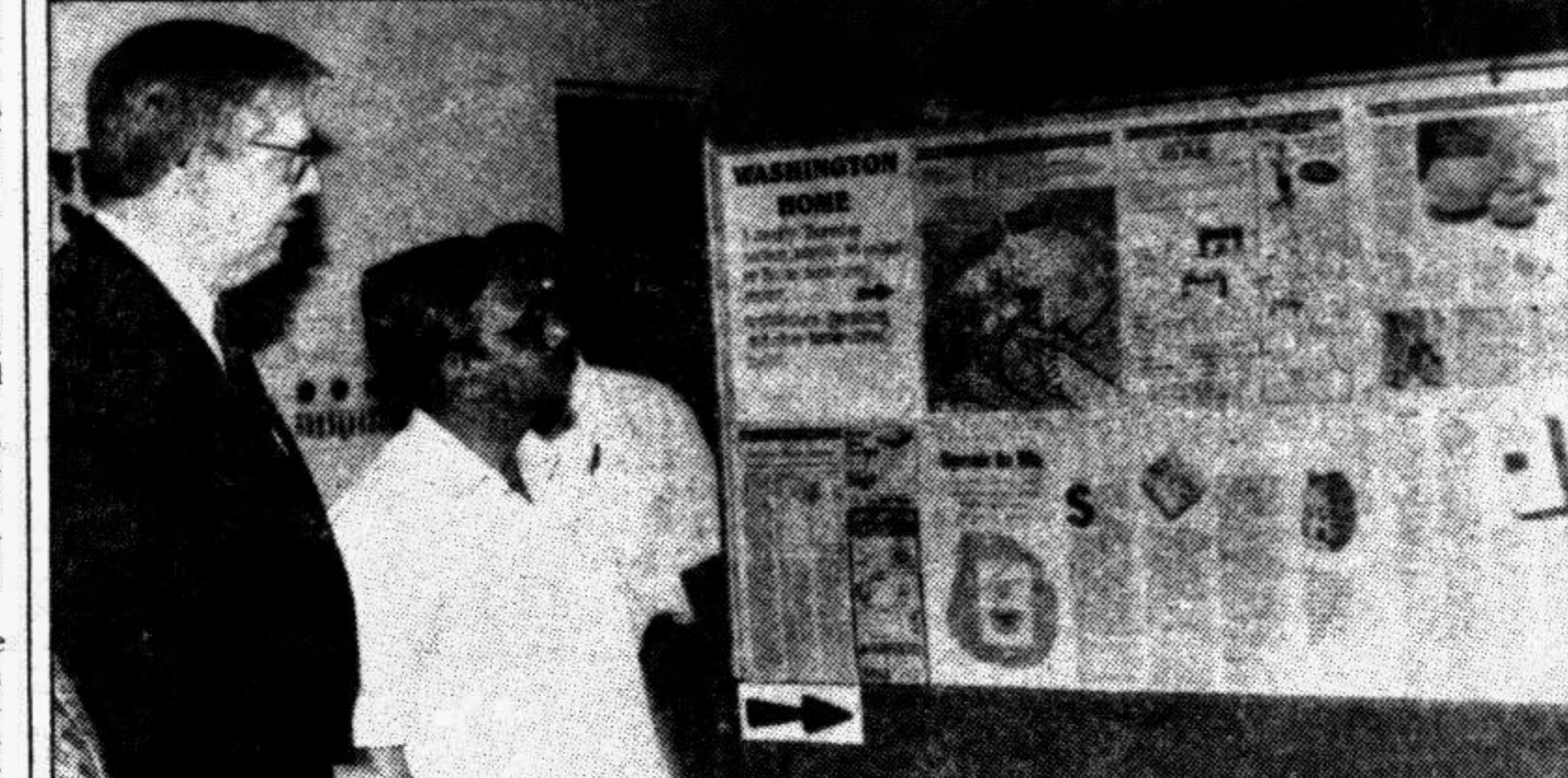
Showers

From Page 1
accompanied by temporary and squally wind is likely at one or two places over Dhaka division and in the regions of Noakhali, Comilla and Sylhet today.

The weather, however, will remain unchanged over the country. There may be a slight rise in day temperature. The country's highest temperature — 42.7 degree Celsius — was recorded at Chuadanga and the lowest, 22.4, at Sylhet.

Newspaper retains its own charm

By Staff Correspondent



An exhibition of Washington newspapers began in the capital yesterday to highlight the truth that despite the big inroads made by the electronic media over the years, newspapers still retain the capacity to be a veritable carnival for readers, journalists, editors and advertisers.

The week-long exposition of a number of dailies and periodicals coming out from the US capital, Washington DC, and its neighbouring areas was described by the organisers as an attempt to show how successful newspapers can be in terms of both bold journalism and profitability.

The United States Information Service (USIS) and the Jatiya Press Club have jointly sponsored the fair with an aim to encourage quality journalism in the hundreds of publications coming out from Dhaka and other parts of the country.

Donald M Bishop, Director of the USIS-Dhaka, while speaking at the opening ceremony, said the timing of this exhibition is also significant since the newspaper industry here is expanding every day.

"Let the Washington newspapers speak for the American society, journalism and democracy," he said.

Occupying the pride of place in the well-thought-out display is the Washington Post, a newspaper founded more than a hundred years ago, with a circulation figure of 8,38,902 copies a day.

Anything newsy is reported in the daily while anything that could be sold in the market place appears as a classified.

On Sundays, the circulation of the Post, which has so far won 15 Pulitzer Prizes for excellence in journalism, reaches more than 11 lakh readers — a

dream of every newspaperman and the advertiser!

Yet, circulation-wise, nationally the Post ranks only fifth among the top 100 US newspapers. The largest circulated is the Wall Street Journal which comes out from New York and sells more than 18 lakh copies a day.

The more conservative Washington Times, also on display at the exhibition which runs until May 6 and is open to the public, has a relatively low circulation — 89,447 copies each day.

The Washington Post publishes 38 special editions throughout the year and it has regular sections like education, employment, entertainment, styles, farm/agriculture, fashion, feature, films, food, gardening, health, music, science-technology and sports.

Its regular front page, world news and opinion contains between 18 and 28 pages. Twelve pages are filled every day with classified ads.

The business sections has 12 regular pages while real estate covers a 24-page section which comes out every Saturday.

A full page ad in the Post costs US dollar 26,000, informed the USIS director.

Yet, the pro-Republican Washington Times is gaining ground because the US Congress is now led by the Republicans.

Speaking on the occasion, Reazuddin Ahmed, President of the Jatiya Press Club, expressed hopes despite the dismal picture of Dhaka newspapers' limited readership and revenue income.

The pro-democracy movement of 1990 had successfully helped delete some of the blackest press laws. However, a few others still remain to impede the healthy growth of journalism in this country, he pointed out.

The other smaller newspapers displayed in the exhibition at the Press Club auditorium include The Arlington Journal, The Fairfax Journal and The Prince George's Journal, serving the three counties around Washington DC.

Besides, the community tabloid The City Paper and the Washington Informer, a tabloid serving Washington's metropolitan black community, are also on display.

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