

Down to Earth City's Rootless Children

By A S M Nurunnabi

The rootless children are also known as street children who form a miserable part of the city's poor and take recourse to various means to earn a living for survival. Their vast numbers include those working in markets and doing various odd jobs and living at railway stations, bus terminals and launch ghats.

There are no dependable statistics as to the total number of these rootless children in Dhaka City. But judged by their ubiquitous presence in all areas of the city, it seems that their total number may run into few lakhs. And their number may be steadily swelling owing to economic reasons. In some other cities of the world, these wretched children are known by various names. For example, in Bolivia, they are called 'Mothers' in Cameroon 'Chicks', in Vietnam Children of the Dust and in Colombo 'Bed Bugs'. In our country, they are known as 'Tokai'.

As everywhere, they have a precarious existence. They are particularly at risk for drug and sexual abuses. They do not seem to have any social security.

Though quite a large number of them are found to be begging, not all other seem to be resourceless. Most of them latter take to one form of odd job or another to keep their body and soul together. Some of the jobs they are found engaged in include carrying small loads at city bazaars where they are known as 'mintis', shoe polishing at important road corners, vending a variety of wares ranging from match boxes to peanuts and doing various chores in small shops, etc.

Some tokais are also used by anti-social elements for their nefarious ends. Particularly during hartals, some of them are seen playing a destructive role of damaging vehicles or obstructing their movement. That is why on many occasions it has been seen that prior to a hartal the police are found to be round them up and detaining them during the hartal period.

Associated with the plight of the street children is the problem of child labour. Official statistics suggest that 25 per cent of families of Bangladesh are dominated by mothers who are forced to depend on the earnings of their children for bare survival. A large chunk of the children, in course of their struggle for existence, become undernourished and physically lagging out normal activities of life. Child abuse through under-age employment, and employment in jobs which only stunt the growth of a child's normal faculties has been a black spot in our socio-economic scene.

Under the prevailing circumstances, a concerted plan is needed to ameliorate the sufferings of the rootless children by taking measures for their rehabilitation. It is admittedly a gigantic task. However, the government should come forward and take the lead in organising all concerned quarters in the task of their rehabilitation. It appears that the Department of Social Welfare has tried to address the problem but in a small way. It has established a rehabilitation for distressed children at Konabari under Gazipur district with a limited capacity for 300 children to provide them with general, technical and vocational education. Under the previous regime, a rehabilitation scheme for such children with the name Pathakali Trust was initiated. Its activities were discontinued with the end of that regime and no organisation was set up in its place.

According to observers, the large number of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) operating in the country may also make significant contribution. Along with their many projects on health, education, environment, self-employment, etc. they may also take up projects for rehabilitation of rootless and underprivileged children. In this context, the activities of one particular NGO, viz. Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme may be mentioned. This NGO exclusively addresses itself to the educational and social rehabilitation needs of working boys and girls in urban areas.

Unfortunately the full implications of facing up to the growing challenge of rehabilitation of the rootless children are yet to be felt by the concerned government agencies. A greater measure of political will and increased public investment are needed if there are to be changes which may improve the condition of the luckless children and effect betterment of their chance in life. If the path of development is given a conscious redirection to make it a positive force for socio-economic change, it may be possible to make the whole situation a little more humane and more sensitive and supportive of the unfortunate children. If we fail in this direction, it may contribute to the creation of an urban crisis.



A Shiite woman from Southern Lebanon yesterday searching through personal belongings among the rubble of her house in the village of Jarjou, hit by an Israeli shell. — AFP/UNB photo

Iran postpones today's rally in Makkah

TEHRAN, May 5: Iran, criticising Saudi Arabia for bringing out troops in Makkah, postponed a controversial rally planned for Saturday, Tehran radio reported today, reports Reuters.

But it repeated Iran's stand that the rally, called the 'disavowal of infidels' ceremony where the United States and Israel are condemned as enemies of Islam, was a pillar of the yearly Muslim pilgrimage.

"In order to preserve the sanctity of the shrine (Kaaba) and avoid its defiling by (Saudi) troops, the ceremonies will not be performed in Makkah on May 6," Iran's pilgrimage supervisor Mohammad Mohammadi-Reyshahri was quoted as saying.

"God willing, we will perform this godly duty in Arifat or Mena," he said in a statement in reference to two locations near Makkah. It did not give a new date for the rally.

"It is most unfortunate that the government of Saudi Arabia has brought out military and security forces and insisted on stopping the ceremonies," it said.

Iranian pilgrims should "set an example for all pilgrims" by keeping calm, it urged.

Saudi Arabia says the Hajj is a purely religious matter and bans all political activities during the pilgrimage attended by two million Muslims from around the world.

Last year, Iran cancelled a similar rally in Makkah. It was later held at the Iranian pilgrims' tent compound.

Saudi Arabia places tight security around Iranian pilgrims to stop them from holding such a rally. In 1987, some 402 people, mostly Iranians, died in clashes with security forces in Makkah.

BCL, Shibir boycott today's BAUCSU elections

MYMENSINGH, May 5: Elections to the Bangladesh Agricultural University Central Students Union (BAUCSU) and nine hall unions will be held tomorrow, but without participation of the student wings of three main opposition parties, reports UNB.

The pro-Awami League BCL (S-P) and the Jamaat-backed Islami Chhatra Shibir have boycotted the elections while all the nomination papers of the Jatiya Party-backed Chhatra Samaj were cancelled during the scrutiny due to technical fault.

The voting will begin at 8:00 am and continue till 1:30 pm without any break.

According to election officials, the total number of voters is 4662, including 576 female voters.

Sixty-two candidates, from four panels are vying for the 17 BAUCSU posts while another 403 for the nine hall unions. Each hall student union has 15 posts.

In the electoral race, the ruling party's student wing — the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) — has two panels, one led by Chanchal-Sharif and the other by Tuhi-Tofa.

Zahir and Kajar are leading the panel backed by Ganotantrik Chhatra Oikya, comprising the Samajtantrik Chhatra Front and the Bangladesh Chhatra Union.

Another partial panel without any political backing is also contesting the election. It is led by Monir and Sahin.

Five killed in road accidents

COMILLA, May 5: At least four people were killed and ten others injured when a passenger bus hit a truck on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway near Comilla town midnight last night, reports BSS.

According to information available, the accident occurred when the Dhaka-bound night coach bearing number CHT Metro Ba-02-0002 hit a truck bearing No Comilla Ta-3715 standing at Kabila, about 12 kilometres west of the town.

All the victims died on the spot and the injured were taken to nearby hospital and clinics.

Two dead were identified, while two unclaimed bodies were buried in a nearby graveyard.

A case has been instituted in this connection with Burichang thana.

Meanwhile, UNB adds: An old man was killed in an accident near Madarpur in Demra thana on Dhaka-Narayanganj road early today.

Police said Nazir Ahmed, 70, was knocked down by a speeding bus when he was crossing the road. He died on the spot.

A case was filed with Demra police station.

Truck drivers keep passengers stranded at Aricha ghat

MANIKGANJ, May 5: Several hundred passengers were stranded on ferries at the Aricha ghat for three hours today as truck drivers created obstacles in their disembarkation demanding to allow the trucks to be ferried across without delay, reports UNB.

Officials said the truck drivers put barricades on the unloading ramp of Aricha terminal at about 1 pm that caused stoppage of ferry services between the Aricha-Nagarbari and Aricha-Daulatdia routes.

Shibalaya Thana Nirbahi Officer, local police officials and a deputy general manager of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control at 4 pm.

Sources said some six ferries which arrived from opposite destinations could not unload their passenger coaches and trucks for three hours due to the barricades.

Nor'wester hits Kanaighat

SYLHET, May 5: Ten people were injured as a severe nor'wester swept over the different villages of Kanaighat thana early today.

At least one thousand thatched houses were damaged and a huge number of trees were uprooted during the storm, official sources said.

The affected unions are Bara Chhatul, Laxmirosad Purbia, Laxmirosad Paschim and Kanaighat Sadar.

Bomb scare hits US embassy in Brussels

BRUSSELS, May 5: The US embassy in Brussels was hit by a bomb scare today after security services discovered a suspect parcel which turned out to be harmless, police said, reports AFP.

The package, which was addressed to a member of staff, aroused concern because the employee's name was spelt incorrectly, embassy spokesman Sheldon Austin said.

Embassy security officials were unable to establish its contents with their scanner and decided to call in explosive experts, who destroyed the package in a controlled explosion, embassy spokesman Sheldon Austin said.

Police said the building, which is surrounded by other embassies and ministerial buildings, had been evacuated and cordoned off.

Biswas

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and government have been invited by the British government to attend the celebrations which would project the themes of 50 years of peace, international reconciliation and the benefits the war time generation won for the subsequent generations.

President Biswas during his official visit, will attend a luncheon to be hosted by the Queen of Great Britain for the heads of state and government participating in the celebrations.

During his stay in Britain, the President will take the opportunity to exchange views with the other heads of state and government attending the celebrations.

Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder and State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism M A Mannan saw the President off at the Zia International Airport.

The Midnight File

India for bilateral talks to end Kashmir crisis

NEW DELHI, May 5: Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Kumar Mukherjee reiterated that India wanted to resolve the Kashmir issue only through bilateral negotiations. He told reporters here today that the prospects of resumption of the stalled dialogue with Pakistan would depend upon its response to Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's renewed offer for talks, reports Xinhua.

UN withdraws anti-sniping team in Gorazde

SARAJEVO, May 5: The United Nations has withdrawn an anti-sniping team in the eastern enclave of Gorazde, accusing Bosnian government forces of using it as a shield to launch attacks against Bosnian Serbs, a spokesman said Friday. A unit of British peacekeepers in Gorazde was withdrawn to barracks Thursday. UN spokesman Lt Col Gary Coward said, after troops loyal to the Muslim-led government in Sarajevo refused to halt firing from positions where the blue helmets patrol, reports AP.

Pro-BJP activists burn Benazir's effigies

NEW DELHI, May 5: Police used water cannon today to disperse hundreds of Hindu nationalists protesting against a meeting between Pakistan's president and Kashmiri separatists on Indian soil, reports Reuters.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) said demonstrating members of the youth wing of the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) burned effigies of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in the Indian capital to protest against the meeting.

Police trained water cannon on the demonstrators to prevent them from marching to Pakistan's high commission, PTI said.

President Farooq Leghari met leaders of the all party Hurriyat (freedom) Conference in New Delhi on Thursday before returning to Islamabad from a South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit.

They met at the Pakistani high commission where they spoke for three hours and prayed together, newspapers said.

A BJP member of Parliament later led a small delegation to the embassy where they submitted a statement denouncing Pakistan's alleged interference in India's affairs, PTI said.

Leghari was quoted as telling reporters upon arriving in Islamabad that it would be a "farce" for India to hold elections in Kashmir and that the Hurriyat, which includes more than 30 separatist groups, would not take part in polls.

Separatist leaders were tight-lipped after the meeting.

India's next polls in first quarters of '96

NEW DELHI, May 5: India's next parliamentary elections will be held in the first quarter of 1996, the election commission announced today, reports AFP.

The poll panel said in a statement here that this was decided in response to a government request that the elections should be held before the start of the farming season and school and university exams in March and April.

The five-year-term of the present parliament expires in June 1996, but the government wanted to avoid holding elections at the height of the summer season that begins in May, the election commission said.

AP adds: Bowing to a demand by all the major political parties, the independent election commission Friday cancelled the balloting to nine seats in the federal Parliament, less than a year before nationwide general elections.

The Interior Ministry had asked the Election Commission to hold off on the May 27 balloting, a government statement said.

Political parties had said they could not afford the cost of the campaigning.

ADB project

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expediting the fielding of consultants to avoid further delay in implementation of the 32.2 m-dollar second water supply and sanitation project.

About the 98.2m-dollar Dhaka integrated flood protection project, the ADB called for initiating a survey of the project area for the purpose of land classification.

Suggesting measures to settle the net intra-governmental arrears of pourasabhas as soon as possible, the Bank suggested monitoring the implementation of financial actions by the pourasabhas under the 43.2m-dollar secondary infrastructure development project.

The Bank also suggested expediting award of civil work contracts which have been approved by the Bank recently under the 36.1m-dollar Bangladesh Open University project.

The ADB found the implementation of the 151.2m-dollar road improvement and 30.5 m-dollar cyclone damaged road construction project 'substantially delayed' and asked the authorities to expedite the process.

Manzur murder

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So far three retired army were arrested in connection with the case.

Major (ret'd) Kazi Emdadul Huq, who had taken custody of Gen Manzur from police, Lt Col (ret'd) Shamsur Rahman, who identified the body of Manzur at the CMH, Chittagong, and Maj Gen (ret'd) Abdul Latif, are now held in different jails.

Another CID source said the case might be shifted to a court in Dhaka when the final hearing begins. It needs permission from the High Court, he added.

Primary hearings are being held in the courts of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) and the District and Sessions Judge, Chittagong.

So far the bail prayers moved separately on behalf of the three army officials were rejected. The family members of Latif were not planning to move a bail prayer in the High Court, a source said.

Water talks

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equally and there is no question of treating one with discriminatory attitudes. However, he said, every country has its own perception and priority but added that New Delhi's ties with Dhaka are "excellent."

About trade imbalance, Mukherjee said India is keen to increase imports from Bangladesh.

He called the outcome of the eighth SAARC summit as 'very positive' and added that foreign ministers of the member nations will meet here in December next for a commemorative meeting and regular meeting of the Council of Ministers.

14 more killed in Kashmir violence

NEW DELHI, May 5: Fourteen people have been killed in violence in the Indian state of Kashmir, where Muslim militants are campaigning for independence, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today, says AFP.

Eight of the victims were militants, killed by Indian security forces or in internecine fighting, the news agency said in a report from Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital. The other dead were civilians.

Barring one, all deaths occurred late Thursday, the news agency said.

Muslim guerillas shot dead a friend of a Kashmir politician in Baramulla district, bordering Pakistan. A Muslim woman was killed in Srinagar today when militants lobbed a grenade at a security picket.

Four other civilians were killed in separate attacks by militants across the Kashmir valley.

Indian security forces shot dead six militants, while two others were killed by rival groups, PTI said.

PTI adds: India will go ahead with its move to construct a wire fence along the international border in the Jammu region, despite objections raised by Pakistan.

Participating in the biennial meeting of security officials of India and Pakistan, Dr Surinder Singh, the Border Security Force (BSF) Inspector General (Jammu area) said the Jammu border was well-demarcated with pillars since the British time and as such the construction of wire fencing will not be stopped.

Dr Singh said Pakistan's objection, that construction of wire fencing should not be carried out because the Jammu border was a disputed one, was not relevant since Islamabad had not objected to the construction of roads earlier in the same area.

Fencing is essential to prevent increased cases of smuggling, particularly of narcotics and gold, he said.

The Indian team, which returned from Lahore yesterday after taking part in a two-day meeting of security officials of the two countries, was led by Ashok Bhandari, BSF Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Rome food summit

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Projections indicate that by the year 2010, if action is not taken to reverse present trends, the number of chronically undernourished people in sub-Saharan Africa may reach 300 million, nearly one-half of the total for developing countries. This part of Africa will thus replace South Asia as the global area with the highest number of persons chronically undernourished even though its total population by then will be only half that of South Asia.

Toros said FAO has entered its 50th anniversary this year, with celebrations in October and culminating in the World Food Summit in November 1996, and these events share a central theme — "Food for All."

The global events this year will include an international symposium in Quebec City in Canada, where FAO was born on October 16, 1945, and a ministerial meeting, also in Quebec City.

At the World Food Conference in 1974, governments examined the global problem of food production and consumption, proclaiming that "every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop fully and maintain their physical and mental faculties." Many conferences and congresses have addressed certain aspects of the issues related to food security in the context of their particular agenda, but since that time, world leaders have not had an opportunity to pronounce themselves on an overall assessment of the state of global food security and the perspectives for the future. The goal of eradicating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition "within a decade," as expressed by the 1974 Conference, has also not been reached.

Govt is corrupt: Golam Azam

KHULNA, May 5: Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Golam Azam today demanded resignation of the BNP government and transfer power to a caretaker authority three months before the next general elections, reports UNB.

"So far, no partisan government could hold free and fair elections. The election of 1991 was free and fair as it was conducted by a caretaker government," he told a public meeting here this afternoon.

Calling the government "corrupt," he said that under this government, misery of the people has aggravated as unemployment is on the rise.

The Jamaat leader alleged that the BNP government could offer nothing but repression, violence.

Maid killed

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Nazrul returned to Dhaka a few years back after a long stay in England. He was a banker there, neighbours said.

Police sent the body of maid Momtaz, daughter of Motaleb Miah of Madaripur, to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). Our correspondent said.

Besides, Nazrul was a private from the DMCH to a shiva clinic.

NWD system with 17 dists collapsed

The Nationwide Dialing (NWD) system in the capital and 17 northern districts suddenly collapsed at 2 am yesterday due to mechanical fault in Bogra exchange, reports UNB.

T & T officials said a two-member team led by NWD Divisional Engineer Moklesur Rahman had already reached Bogra to restore the line.

The affected districts include Chapainawabganj, Gaibandha, Ishwardi, Jaipurhat, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Meherpur, Naogaon, Natore, Nilphamari, Panchagarh, Sirajganj, Svedpur and Thanetkani.

Ashes of Desai immersed

NEW DELHI, May 5: The ashes of former premier Morarji Desai were immersed in the Yamuna this morning after presentation of a guard of honour to the late centenarian leader by the Delhi police, reports PTI.

Environment bill

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cerns such as water supply, sanitation, forestry, agriculture, electric power, transportation, industrial waste and population.

Environmental issues that cross national boundaries and need governments' increasing attention are acid rain, biodiversity and climate change, he adds.

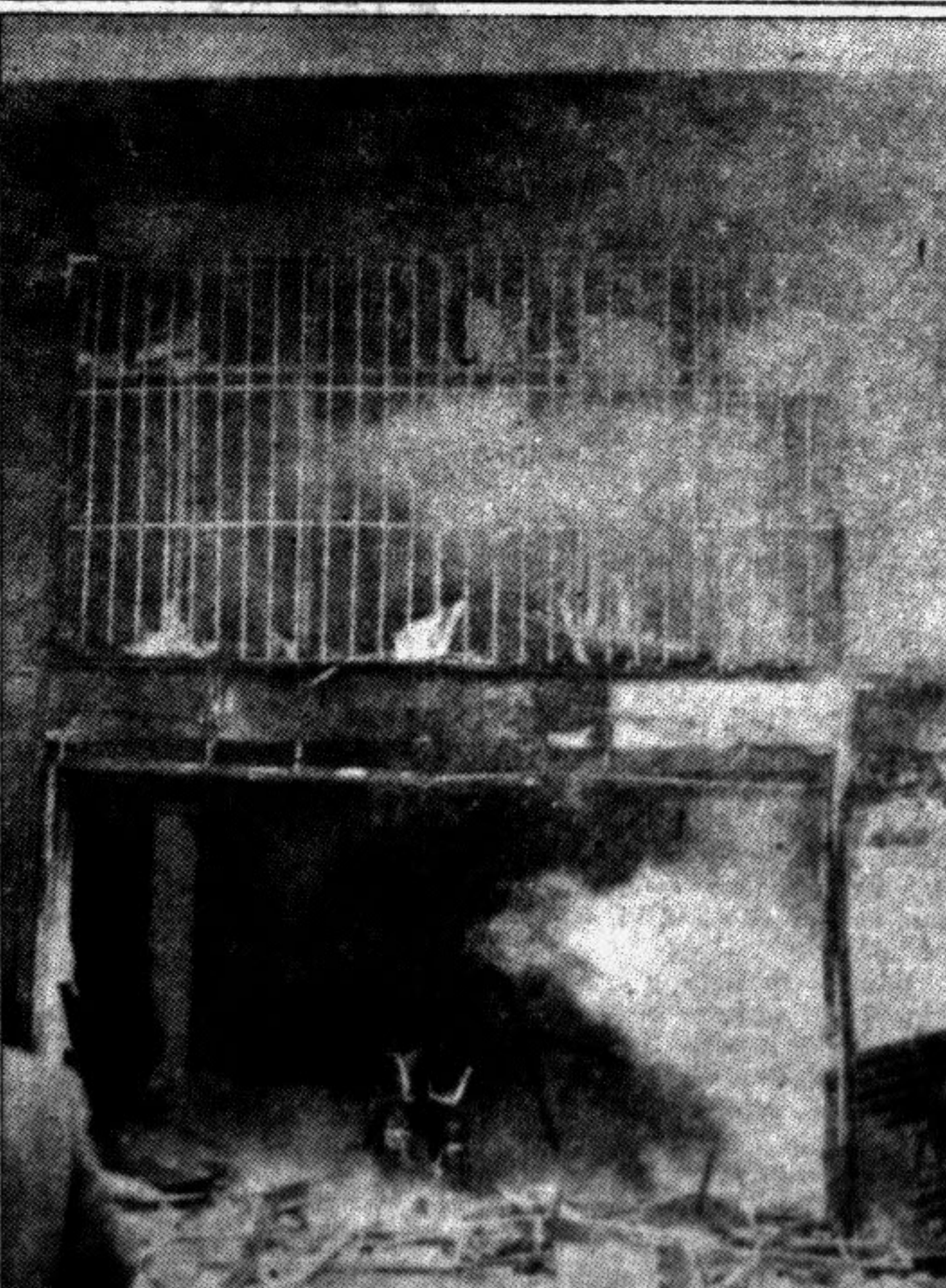
While his estimates are rough, Weatherly says they show that "the promotion of sustainable development will require more than addressing the need to integrate better environmental and economic policies. Additional financing resources are also needed."

"Environmental financing needs over the next decade are likely to place a considerable burden on developing countries, which may be unable to take the often politically difficult measures to ease this strain," analyst Jeremy Warford says in an overview of Weatherly's study.

He says the bulk of these amounts are likely to be passed on donor nations, but these may experience aid fatigue. Experts say it is hard to pinpoint the percentage of aid to Asia that goes to the environment. But Japan spends 12.4 per cent of its aid on environmental management.

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Firemen trying to extinguish the fire in a shopping centre in Istanbul yesterday, after some PKK terrorists threw Molotov cocktails into the building. Three young girls died in the fire. — AFP/UNB photo