

DOWN TO EARTH

City's Decaying Cinema Houses

By A S M Nurunnabi

For many citizens of the Dhaka city, cinema houses as a mode of wholesome entertainment have lost much of their attraction. This is mainly due to the poor and unhealthy environmental condition in most of the city's cinema houses. Even 15 or 20 years ago, these cinema houses provided harmless and healthy form of family entertainment to the educated and cultivated sections of the citizens on account of their better management and existence of improved facilities. The present picture is entirely different.

At present we observe a glaring insufficiency of facilities in some important respects even in some famous cinema halls. Where there is provision of air-conditioning facility, it is alleged that the facility is discontinued at some stage of the shows, thereby causing great discomfort for the viewers, particularly in summer. In some of the cinema houses which were previously equipped with AC, the facility is alleged to have been withdrawn for greater commercial benefit of the owners, the underlying reason being that the AC-equipped show houses are assessed to higher rate of capacity tax.

Under the rules, the owners of cinema houses are required to provide for the spectators comfortable seats, adequate number of toilets, restaurant, bookstore, fire-fighting arrangement and emergency exits. Unfortunately such provisions are available only in a few cinema halls. The seating arrangement in most of the cinema houses is of a low standard, with bugs and other insects infesting it. There is no satisfactory ventilation system and fire-fighting arrangement is inadequate in some of the cinema houses. Though all requirements under the rules are not fulfilled, the licensing authority continues to renew their licenses without compelling the cinema houses at fault to take corrective measures. There are about 56 cinema halls in Dhaka city and Narayanganj.

The environmental situation in most of the cinema houses is as bad outside as the one inside. The areas outside are frequented by touts, ticket black-marketeers and some other anti-social elements. There are allegations that some sections of corrupt employees and even some owners of cinema halls are involved in the patronage of these bad elements. In many of the cinema houses, malpractices are said to be adopted in calculating charges for admission tickets.

When a new movie is released in any of these halls, it provides a field day for these elements to sell admission tickets in the black market in the initial period at 2/3 times the normal rate. If the released movie is a box-office hit, such black-marketing of tickets continues for a longer period. It is alleged that part of the ill-gotten money earned through such evil practices goes into the pockets of some employees and even of some owners of the cinema houses.

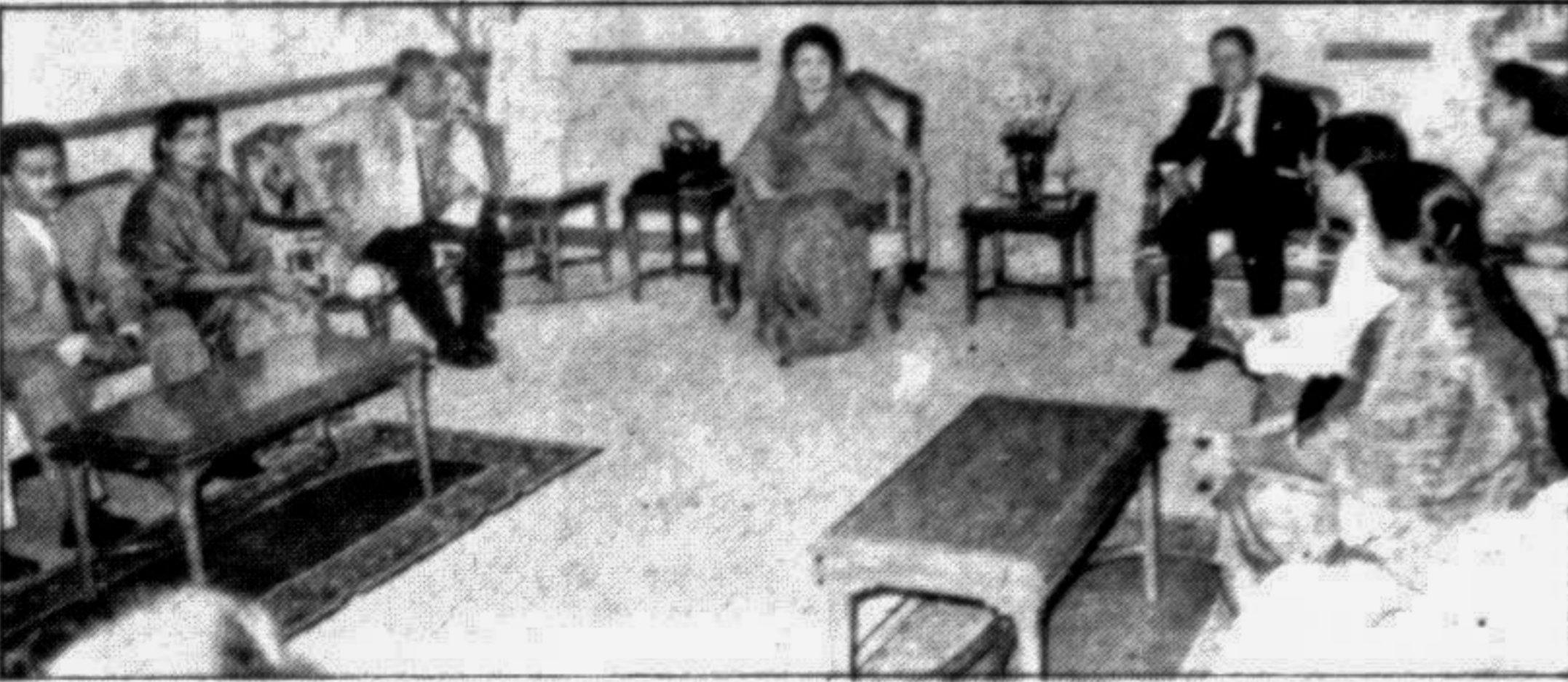
On account of such goings-on in many of the halls, the educated and cultured sections of the citizens are averse to visiting a cinema hall to enjoy a picture. This trend is unfortunate in as much as if proper atmosphere prevailed in the cinema halls, it could contribute largely to the availability of healthy and wholesome entertainment at these halls through the medium of cinema.

It is reported that such poor condition does not exist in most Asian countries. Even in India, a better condition reportedly exists. There the total number of cinema houses is said to be 13000 and everyday 12 million viewers attend them, and every year 500 new show houses reportedly come up.

Apart from the poor environmental condition in most of the city's show houses, they are subject to criticism on the point that some of them are so located that they contribute, in a large measure, to the creation of traffic jams at those places with the crowd of outgoing and incoming spectators during show schedules.

The cinema houses are already facing a challenge from the emergence of video culture which allows a large number of people to enjoy a wide variety of films in the comfort of their homes. The challenge has been lately intensified in some measure by the foreign TV programmes available through dish antenna.

In order to exist in the face of these challenges, the cinema houses need to improve their standard. In most countries of Asia, the movie exhibition business is developing into an expanding industry on account of good management, modernisation of facilities for viewers and improvement of total environment. Observers believe that the show houses in our country can be an effective instrument of good entertainment if the concerned agencies adopt bold corrective steps to save them from the state of mismanagement, corrupt practices and detrimental environmental situation.



The newly-elected office-bearers of the Supreme Court Bar Association, led by its president Justice T H Khan, called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleida Zia at her Hare Road office yesterday.

Protest day observed

Benazir asks India to open talks

ISLAMABAD, May 18: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto urged India today to start negotiations with Pakistan and the Kashmiri leadership for a UN-sponsored plebiscite in Kashmir, reports AFP.

Two generations "have been kept hostage by the Kashmir dispute for the last 50 years," Bhutto said in a nationally-broadcast address on the eve of a protest day.

"We need to save the third generation from it," she added.

She called the Friday protest against last week's destruction of a 15th century Islamic shrine in the Kashmir town of Charar-e-Sharif during an assault by Indian troops to flush out Muslim guerrillas.

Bhutto said it was "about time" that some Indian leaders acted like the late Indian premier Jawaharlal Nehru and announced their readiness for a plebiscite and stressed this was "the only solution."

New Delhi rejects a referendum under the UN resolutions adopted after the first war in 1948 between the two countries, the dispute led to another war in 1965.

The Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said Wednesday India was committed to resolving all disputes with Islamabad, including over Kashmir, bilaterally and peacefully.

Bhutto appealed to people in Pakistan and Islamabad-controlled northern third of Kashmir to "come out on the streets" on Friday to condemn the shrine sacrilege and to demonstrate solidarity with Kashmir "freedom fighters."

Meanwhile, responding to a call by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, shops and markets remained closed and the national flag flew at half-mast as Pakistan observed a protest day today to condemn the destruction of a Muslim shrine in Indian-administered Kashmir, reports AFP.

In a rare move, the national flag was lowered to half-mast to mourn the May 9 burning of the 15th-century tomb of a Muslim saint, Noorudin Wali, in the town of Charar-e-Sharif.

Demonstrations were also held in Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistani-administered Kashmir, where effigies of Indian leaders were burned.

The anti-India rallies, sponsored by the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and backed by other religious and political groups were being organised in Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad after Juma prayers.

Mystery balloons land in Japan

TOKYO, May 19: At least 10 mysterious balloons landed over wide areas in western Japan Friday, the second such incident in less than a week, police said, reports AP.

The balloons were recovered across five prefectures, including Hiroshima, 687 kilometers southwest of Tokyo. There were no reports of injuries.

Last Saturday, about 30 balloons measuring about 6 meters (20 feet) in length and 2 meters (7 feet) in diameter were recovered in western and central Japan.

Nobuyuki Kono, a spokesman of the Hiroshima Prefectural Police, said local residents in the province found three balloons that were similar to those recovered last Saturday.

The previous balloons had 15-centimeter plastic tubes hanging from them bearing the words "on," "off" and "test" in English, police officials said.

The tubes were believed to be some kind of apparatus for weather observation, they said, adding that police scientists were still investigating.

There were similar incidents in May last year in the same region, when dozens of vinyl balloons landed after being released on the Korean Peninsula, the spokesman said.

Newsman dead

CHITTAGONG, May 19: Alhaj Kazi Kabiruddin, an elderly journalist and eminent social worker, died of old age complications at his Salpur residence here this evening, his family sources said. He was 94, reports BSS.

He left behind four sons, four daughters, professional colleagues, large number of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held at Houzderhat high school premises tomorrow. He will be buried at his family graveyard.

15 more killed in Karachi violence

KARACHI, May 19: Four security officers were killed by unknown armed men today, bringing the death toll in 24 hours of violence in the Pakistani port city to 15, officials said, reports AFP.

Three paramilitary rangers and a policeman were killed today, they said.

The previous day a paramilitary officer and 10 civilians were killed as another round of seeming sectarian and ethnic violence gripped the country's economic capital.

More than 300 people have been arrested and police have confiscated arms and ammunition, police said paramilitary troops and police were out in force in several districts where gunmen had attacked law enforcers.

Thursday's violence erupted when a paramilitary officer was shot dead and six of his men injured in an ambush in central Karachi's north Nazimabad district.

Within hours, shooting spread across the city paralyzing life in the western and eastern districts. Troops exchanged fire with gunmen in several localities, dozens of people were injured in the cross-fire, hospital sources said.

Militants equipped with automatic weapons set fire to at least two vehicles and tried to torch government property, officials said.

Witnesses said armed men took up positions on rooftops and street corners, to snipe at paramilitary troops and police.

In central Karachi's Liaquatabad district, armed men fired a rocket at a police station, but no one was hurt, police said.

Officials have not held any sectarian or ethnic groups responsible for the killings. "The situation will become clear once we screen the detainees," a security official said.

The army withdrew from the city in November last year, leaving rangers and police to contain Karachi's endemic violence.

Taslima to stay in Germany for 3 months

STOCKHOLM, May 19: Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen, who has been living in exile in Sweden for nine months, is moving temporarily to Germany, her Swedish publisher said Friday, reports AP.

Svante Weyler of Norstedt said the feminist writer has been awarded a stipend enabling her to live and write in Berlin for three months starting in June, the news agency TT reported.

"My money has run out, so I am letting the German state take care of me," she was quoted as saying by the Swedish daily Metro.

Weyler told TT, Taslima would return to Sweden, "her permanent residence in exile," after her stay in Germany.

"She wants to go back to Bangladesh as soon as the government can guarantee her safety," he said.

"She is also prepared to go to jail, if she can be sure she won't be persecuted," he said.

After her arrival in Sweden last year, a writers' association awarded her a 150,000-kronor (20,400 dollars) stipend. TT said she had used the money to pay for her costs in Sweden.

Ebola virus claims 89 in Zaire

GENEVA, May 19: Eighty-nine people have died from the ebola virus in hospitals and communities in Zaire's Kikwit region, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced today, reports AFP.

Caretaker govt

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countering a previous statement of the AL.

In the counter-statement, the BNP Secretary General branded the AL as the 'agent' of India.

"I should defend myself if someone makes an allegation against me," he said, adding "Such press statement cannot impede the initiative for a dialogue since politics is a continuous process."

When his attention was drawn to the Opposition stand that the BNP should accept in principle the concept of a caretaker government, Talukdar asked "Is there any need for a dialogue if we unilaterally declare acceptance of the caretaker proposal?"

He expressed the hope that the present political impasse would be resolved before the next budget session of Parliament.

When contacted over telephone, Zillur Rahman said "the ruling party had vitiated the atmosphere before starting a dialogue."

He, however, said their party chief has already returned from a visit to the southern districts and the "matter might be discussed soon."

Procession marking birthday of Russia's last Czar

MOSCOW, May 19: Some 150 monarchists waving black, yellow and white czarist flags marched across downtown Moscow on Friday to mark the birthday of Russia's last czar, reports UNB.

"It's our people's tragedy that we couldn't protect our emperor," said one participant, Yuri Potapov who held a portrait of Czar Nicholas II, executed along with his family by the Bolsheviks in 1918.

Maid murder

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The two-day remand for the second time ended yesterday.

Detectives investigating the murder revealed that the maid was seriously injured even before falling from the apartment, police sources said.

A senior official of the Detective Branch said that the conduct of Rokshana and the inconsistency among the statements she made so far proved that she was out to conceal the facts. Investigations also showed that Rokshana also tried to hide the body of the maid.

Besides, the private car of Rokshana seized by police Thursday was unregistered and it had a fake number plate. Rokshana used the car to take the maid to a clinic after the fall, according to sources.

Rokshana used different names like Mahmuda Chowdhury, Monowara Chowdhury while her daughter was also known as Sharmin Akhter, Farah Diba and Hira. But Rokshana is better known as 'Farah's mother', police said.



Awami League president Sheikh Hasina addressing an extended meeting of the party's city unit at Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday.

Thai parliament dissolved, elections on July 2

BANGKOK, May 19: Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai dissolved the lower house of Parliament Friday rather than face a no-confidence vote he was sure to lose. He called for new elections to be held July 2, reports AP.

Chuan made the move after a key party abandoned his coalition in protest over a land scandal in which Chuan's party has been accused of handing over land meant for poor farmers to wealthy individuals.

Chuan had hoped to become the first elected prime minister to finish his term of office. He was Thailand's longest serving elected prime minister, having completed 32 months of a four-year term.

The last elected Prime Minister, Chatchai Choonhavan, was ousted by a military coup in 1991. There have been more than a dozen military coups since the end of World War II.

Chuan was swept into power after pro-democracy demonstrations toppled the military junta in 1992.

At a press conference Friday evening, Chuan said he and his remaining coalition partners could find no acceptable way to retain power.

"Therefore the best way is to return power to the people and let them consider what is best," Chuan said.

Chuan's ruling coalition collapsed after its third largest partner, the Palang Dharma party, announced early Friday that it would not support the government in a no-confidence vote scheduled later that day.

A Palang Dharma spokesman said Chuan's party, the Democrats, had failed to clear up suspicions over the land-reform scandal.

The Opposition had been hammering away at the Democrats over the scandal for several months. Earlier in his administration, Chuan had cited the land reform programme as one of his administration's accomplishments.

Party ministers who were involved in the scandal had been dismissed, but that failed to satisfy the Opposition, the public and coalition partner, Palang Dharma.

Palang Dharma is led by Chamlong Srimuang, who played a major part in the pro-democracy demonstrations of 1992 that toppled the military regime that preceded Chuan's elected government.

In an interview with Associated Press last September Chuan said that furthering democracy was his greatest accomplishment.

AL gheraos

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with the Opposition only to confuse the people.

She categorically said that "We want election under a neutral caretaker government as we are fighting for people's rights to vote and food."

"We asked the government to appoint the Chief Election Commissioner in consultations with the Opposition parties which have representation in parliament, but it was not done," she said.

On preparation of the voters' list she said it should have been completed much earlier, during the time of the census. She called on her party workers to remain vigilant against any unfair means during the enrollment of voters so that bonafide voters are not dropped.

Hasina called for making the CEC office gherao programme a success.

Hasina's tour

Another report says: Hasina will visit some areas of North Bengal as part of her mass-contact tour from May 23 to 26.

She will go to Rajshahi, Naogaon, Chapainawabganj and Natore during the four-day tour, says a press release.

Hasina earlier announced nine days (from May 23 to 31) visit to North Bengal was reduced to four days due to some unavoidable reasons, the release added.

The Midnight File

Yeltsin opposes talks with Chechen rebels

MOSCOW, May 19: President Boris Yeltsin today vetoed a parliamentary demand for unconditional peace talks with rebels in Russia's breakaway region of Chechnya. Yeltsin's press service said he was concerned that parliament's law could destabilise the situation in Chechnya rather than lead to a political settlement there. Parliament can overturn a presidential veto with a two-thirds majority, reports Reuter.

Clashes leave 50 dead in Lanka

COLOMBO, May 19: More than 50 Sri Lankan Tamil rebels and soldiers have been killed in clashes in the past three days, the military said today, reports Reuter.

The rebels attacked the forward defence lines of a military camp in the north today, killing seven soldiers, a military spokesman said.

He said 14 soldiers were wounded in the attack near the Elephant Pass base in the rebel-held Jaffna peninsula.

The fighting is still going on. We believe the Tigers are suffering heavy casualties," the spokesman said.

The security forces are fighting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who want their own homeland in the north and east.

Thirty LTTE rebels were killed and 20 wounded in an army operation to extend the area of the Palaly military base in the northern rebel-held Jaffna peninsula on Wednesday, a defence ministry statement said today.

Troops captured 10 sq km east of Palaly and 30 men were injured by machine-gun fire, anti-personnel mines and mortar bombs.

On Thursday, the rebels fired mortars at the new positions and troops retaliated with artillery fire. Four soldiers were injured while rebel casualties were not known, the statement said.

Final voters' list

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tor would register 200 eligible voters through prescribed forms (one for each) after identifying them properly. Every supervisor would verify the task of four enumerators by visiting the houses concerned on June 1 while the assistant registration officers would visit at least 10 per cent of the houses covered on June 1 to check accuracy of the registration.

On June 20, the filled up registration forms would be scrutinised for publishing a rough list of the registered voters on June 25. Objections and claims for inclusions and revisions would be received until July 11 and the revising committees would dispose of the prayers by July 26. Decisions on the registered voters' list would be finalised on July 31 to produce a final voters' list on August 31.

The EC has formed a high-power committee to oversee the task of voters' registration and suggest measures for the introduction of ID cards for them.

As per the EC decisions, the citizens of Bangladesh aged 18 and above on 1 January, 1995, would be deemed qualified to be a voter. None can get registered as voter from more than one place and a voter would be considered an inhabitant of the locality where he/she usually resides. The voters, unless they applied to the registration officers concerned would be regarded voters of their places of jobs.

The EC rules further provide that the inmates of jails would be judged as voters of the areas they used to live in earlier.

The enumerators had been asked to let the voters fill up their respective registration forms themselves and cross-check the information given by the voters through interrogation. In case of illiterate voters and those whose hand writing is illegible, the enumerators themselves would fill up the registration forms and ask the voters concerned to put their signature or thumb impressions on the filled up forms. Overwritten and illegibly written forms would not be accepted and the cancelled forms would have to be returned to the supervisors.

Every registration mould would contain the ID card serial, name, father/mother/husband's name, address, occupation, date of birth, age, educational qualification, identification mark, locality in which to vote, signature/thumb impression, counter sign by the guardian and other relevant facts regarding a voter.

Punitive actions, including jail terms and fine would be taken against persons found guilty of issuing false statements in the registration forms and also for negligence of duties by those engaged in the registration work.

Rao : OIC help

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strategy by Pakistan to step up militancy in Jammu and Kashmir and create an atmosphere of terror so that the entire political process in the state is jeopardised and people are intimidated from exercising their democratic rights," Rao said.

The letter, dated May 17, was obtained by Reuters.

India has accused Muslim militants including Pakistan-backed mercenaries of torching the Shrine. Pakistan and Kashmiri separatists have blamed Indian security forces.

Rao said "Pakistan's goal was to maintain heightened tensions with India and shift the focus from the political process."

"We are determined to hold elections in Jammu and Kashmir," said Rao, who wants to schedule state polls before New Delhi's direct rule authority expires on July 18.

"The political process is the only means through which normalcy can be restored in the state," he said.

Telecom

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Speaking on the occasion Dr Abdul Aziz thanked all concerned engineers and technicians for their hard and sincere work in the installation of the two towers.

In the afternoon Dr Aziz inaugurated the Mirapara Government Primary School cum cyclone shelter at Potenga and another similar primary school at Sitakunda.

He also distributed copies of the holy Quran and cassettes of the Quran to the Imams of different local mosques.

18 murdered

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Besides, a gang of four youths stabbed to death a maid at a fourth floor flat at Green Road. The gang mainly attacked her master, businessman Nazrul Islam, and severely injured him. Police said that the pre-planned attack was made following a dispute over loan money.

Muggers stabbed to death a leather trader, Sharif Jinnah, near the Curzon Hall of Dhaka University in broad day light. They snatched Tk eight lakh from him.

A Chinese national, Ling Jiang, was murdered in a hotel at Nawabpur road under Sutrapur thana. Police said that the killing was the result of a dispute over money.

A Juba League leader, Mahbubur Rahman Tanjil, was shot dead in Sutrapur area on May 7 and a Juba Dal leader was gunned down near Jhikatola Bazar on May 14.

Besides, some young men were murdered in Gulshan, Mohammadpur, Cantonment and Mirpur areas this month and a husband killed his wife at Begumganj lane under Sutrapur thana.

Besides, police recovered the bodies of at least five persons from different areas in the city during this period.

Rabin

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senior EU commission official said.

Relations between the EU, the biggest single donor to the Palestinians, and Israel were already tense over an Israeli refusal to allow aid money to reach Arab East Jerusalem.

Arabs yesterday voiced dismay at the United States veto saying the act would torpedo Middle East peace and make an Arab summit more likely.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak spoke to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad by telephone yesterday about a possible Arab summit to counter Israeli measures in Jerusalem, official sources said today.

Syria, in the past often reluctant to take part in Arab summits, has not yet said if it favours holding one now.

The summit would be limited to eight Arab League members - Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - and the Arab League would like to hold it in Morocco towards the end of this month.