

DOWN TO EARTH

Problem of The Aged In City

By A.S.M. Nurunnabi

A "Day For The Elderly" is observed every year in this country as elsewhere under UN auspices which provides an occasion for giving some thought to the plight of the elderly and to improve their lot in our country. Modern medicine and improved living conditions have expanded the average life span of our people, which has led to a growing increase in the aged population in our society.

In some respects, the problems of the elderly urbanites are somewhat different from those in rural areas.

Elderly people living with their families both give and receive emotional and material support. The family's role in ensuring the care and well-being of the elderly is important and qualitatively different from that of any caregiving institution. However, urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation have contributed to the break-up of the extended family system. Households, formerly comprising many families have been split up into a number of small families living in their own apartments, often a long way apart. As families become smaller and women participate in the workforce, the support traditionally provided to the elderly is being eroded.

It is said that the way in which a nation treats its elderly reflects the level to which its society has evolved. Therefore, whatever be our past good record of care and service for the elderly, their neglect wherever it takes place nowadays represents a blot on our social mores.

Ageing population is one of the major social problems in the world but in Bangladesh there is almost none to take care of the aged people, comprising six per cent of the country's total population.

At a recent press conference, the president of the Bangladesh Association for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine, a centre that

thinks for the welfare of some 70 lakh elderly citizens of the country, said, "We have served for all throughout our lives, now we deserve something from others." A senior member of the Association left it to be a national duty to keep the aged people, who are physically and mentally fit, engaged in constructive work so that they can contribute to the country's progress.

The bane of old age is loneliness whatever be the pursuits followed by the elderly in their daily routine. Sons and daughters of many families, particularly those from affluent homes, leaving their parents behind, go abroad for study or employment. Their long sojourn abroad creates a sort of void in the life of their elderly parents, who continue to live in this country. An old man, placed in such a situation, was heard to lament that when we die, our bodies are kept in cold storage in hospital morgue till our children come from abroad to complete the funeral rites.

Old age is as much a personal problem as a social one. Since we have no social security system as in the west, life in old age here is subject to uncertainties both in economic and health terms. In such a situation, all possible community support, in the opinion of many, is called for to attenuate the helplessness of old age. As the family is considered the basic building block of society, schemes should be introduced with a view to preserving and strengthening the traditional family system to care for the elderly. Since the elderly prefer to live with their children, every incentive should be given to the families who take on the responsibility of looking after old parents. Such a policy is reportedly followed in Singapore. Under this policy, families suffering from financial hardship in looking after elderly parents or grand parents are granted

concessions in the matter of taxation and other facilities.

The aged people may be accorded "senior citizenship" status in order to enable them to enjoy special concessions in travel and medical treatment, as is done in some western societies. Well-wishers for the aged feel there should be a separate ministry for aged people, like those of youth and women affairs. The Ministry of Social Welfare, at present deals with the ageing population, but there is no separate division or personnel exclusively meant for aged people.

The elderly consume a disproportionately large amount of health care resources. Consequently, as the number of older people grows, an increasing burden is placed on the families and the concerned government institutions. In Dhaka, the need for their medical care is sought to be met by a non-official body named Probin Hitoisi Sangha situated at Agargaon. Recently, government reportedly allotted Tk. nine crore to that body to set up a 50-bed hospital and make housing facilities in Dhaka for elderly citizens. At present, with government grant, that body runs a full-fledged medical clinic where treatment is available for old people at concessional charges.

People interested in the welfare of the elderly also recommend that a policy is necessary to keep elderly people physically and mentally fit so that they can maintain their normal daily activities and living arrangements. It is also recommended that education curriculum should be introduced including materials aimed at the traditional family values and teaching the young to love and respect the elderly. A senior citizen's week should be organised annually to promote the status of the elderly and demonstrate the contribution they can make in the community.



Students burn an effigy of Jamaat Amir Golam Azam in front of the National Press Club yesterday. — Star photo

Indian col among 12 killed in violence

House-to-house search to flush out Kashmiri rebels

SRINAGAR (India), June 23: A colonel and three soldiers were among 12 people killed overnight in separatist-linked violence in the northern Indian state of Kashmir, police said here today, reports AFP.

The men died late Thursday in a landmine explosion in the southern district of Anantnag, they said. The town was later sealed and house-to-house raids were being conducted to flush out suspected Muslim militants.

Four Muslim separatists died in a fierce gunbattle with security forces in the Aloochohabag district of Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir, on Thursday evening, police said, reporting four other deaths in separate firefights.

AP adds: Politicians, religious leaders and human rights activists on Friday welcomed India's decision to allow the Red Cross to visit detention centres in Kashmir, saying it could stop Indian soldiers from torturing suspected militants.

The government announced Thursday that it will allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to regularly visit detainees and restore contact between them and their families.

At least 11,600 people have died in Kashmir since a battle for independence by Muslim militants escalated in 1989. Kashmiris often say that men and boys disappear from their families when soldiers search their towns and villages for guerrillas.

Kashmiri human rights activists estimate that Indian soldiers are holding 11,000 suspected militants in jails, interrogation centres and detention camps. International human rights groups often

Ceasefire in Chechnya extended

MOSCOW, June 23: Russian and Chechen negotiators announced today the extension of a ceasefire in Chechnya even as fighting continued in the war-ravaged Caucasus republic, reports AFP.

Russian first Deputy Nationalities Minister Vyacheslav Mikhailov told Itar-Tass news agency that both sides had agreed to extend the ceasefire, which had been due to expire Friday night.

The moratorium on military operations in Chechnya will be extended after Friday, Mikhailov said, adding that a formal accord would be announced later in the day.

The Chechen delegation head, Usman Imaev, was quoted by Itar-Tass as saying his military commanders had instructed fighters "to extend the moratorium on fighting until further orders."

But Imaev also accused Moscow of not respecting the current truce, citing Russian military operation in the Chechen villages of Pervomaiskaya and Samashki.

Imaev said the Russian attacks were aimed at routing out the Chechen commandos who took around 1,500 hostages in the southern Russian town of Budennovsk last week, and whose demands forced Russia to the negotiating table.

The commander of Russian forces in Chechnya, Anatoly Kulikov, was earlier quoted by Interfax as saying Chechen separatists opened fire several times on Russian troops in the capital.

According to Kulikov, fighting also broke out in the south of the small Caucasian republic near the Kharami pass where Russian troops and some 60 rebels were locked in combat for two hours before the separatists dispersed.

Father kills daughter

CHITTAGONG, June 23: One minor girl was beaten to death allegedly by her father at Dabowa under Raojan thana here this morning, reports BSS.

According to district police, one Anwar Hossain, a day labourer of Dabowa rubber plantation, took his child to the nearby garden and beat up as a result, the victim Ruma Akhter, 5, succumbed to her injuries.

Flood

Chhatak and one in Doarabazar thana of Sunamganj in the last two days. In Sunamganj district, 106 medical teams have been sent to flood-hit areas to check further spread of the disease.

Official sources said, precautionary measures have been taken to check post-flood diseases. Medical teams are already operating in some areas.

Our Sirajganj Correspondent reported that road communication between the town and other parts of the northern region was disrupted yesterday as a bridge in the New Bogra Road collapsed in the morning.

The Jamuna fell by 8 cm in Sirajganj but some 24,000 people remained marooned in flood waters in Kazipur, Chowhali and Sahjadpur thanas. Standing crops including aus, aman and groundnut on about 21,000 hectares of land have been damaged.

Our Manikganj Correspondent reported that flood waters gushing through breached Jamuna embankments inundated fresh areas in five more thanas in the district. The affected thanas one — Daulatpur, Horirampur, Shibalaya, Dohar and Nagarpur. The Jamuna has devoured at least 20,000 acres of crop land in the areas where the worst-hit people have taken shelter on the flood protection embankments.

DUTA

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test, according to sources concerned.

The VC, in his June 20 order, gave them permission to be admitted on special consideration. Another student was also given permission.

Meanwhile, the pro Awami League Chhatra League also resented the VC's order.

The Midnight File

EU mediator holds talks with Bosnian president

SARAJEVO, June 23: The European Union's new mediator on former Yugoslavia, Carl Bildt, met Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic for almost two hours of talks on the Bosnia crisis here today. "Peace can only be brought to this country by the people here... what we can do is perhaps help, facilitate and provide the help and assistance of the outside world, that's all," Bildt said as he left the talks, reports AFP.

Hasina : 25-yr treaty

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Farakka problem as well as realising the country's just share of the Ganges water if it goes to power.

"The BNP has no headache to solve problems of the people, it is busy with protecting its own interest and in making money," the Awami League chief told the meeting.

Hasina accused the ministers and MPs of plundering national wealth and relief fund. They misappropriated Tk 25 lakh given from the Prime Minister's fund, she alleged. "The ruling party members also misused 60,000 metric tons of wheat sent as relief."

About the Jamuna Multipurpose bridge, she said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman first planned to construct the bridge and an agreement was signed with Japan in this connection.

The Japanese government sent a team for feasibility study and worked for two years, but the Zia government shelved the plan and used the fund for BNP, she alleged.

In 1991, Hasina said the World Bank had sent a letter to her saying that it would provide fund for the bridge to the government to be elected.

Referring to the fertiliser scandal, the Awami League president said that the ruling party had created the crisis to extract money from the poor farmers and it managed Tk 400 crore by creating the crisis.

She said the BNP government had killed many farmers, workers, students, policemen, Ansars and businessmen during its four and a half years' rule. It spread terrorism and corruption in every sphere of national life, she alleged.

The ruling party has killed the hard earned democracy which is the precondition for economic emancipation of the people, she said.

Karachi violence

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shooting in the air to intimidate people in Korangi, virtually paralysed for the past three days, residents said.

Running gun-battles were also reported between the MQM and its rival faction known as the MQM-Haqiqi.

The MQM, which represents Urdu-speaking migrants from India who came here after the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, split in 1992. In recent weeks, the mainstream MQM has been at loggerheads with the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

Relations worsened Thursday after the MQM accused some members of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of gang-raping the sister of an MQM militant in her home on Tuesday.

The party has named the alleged rapists and said they if they are not arrested within 24 hours, the party would observe two days of 'mourning' — a term by and large accepted by city residents as an unofficial strike.

Manzur murder

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Court Inspector Mohammad Shajahan told the CMM court that Col Kamal, along with his accomplices had killed Gen. Manzur on June 1, 1981, as part of their plot. "The accused was involved in the killing."

Protesting the pleas for fresh remand, Col Kamal's lawyer Gulum Sarwar claimed his client was tortured physically and mentally by the CID police during the detention.

Failing to get confessional statement from Col. Kamal, the police investigators again sought remand which might cause harm to the life of his client, Sarwar said.

City Magistrate Abdur Rahman chaired the court yesterday.

Douglas Hurd resigns

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appointed foreign secretary in October 1989 by Margaret Thatcher.

"I remain a staunch supporter of the prime minister, and have already made clear that I will support him enthusiastically in the election he announced yesterday," Hurd said.

"I have no doubt that he will be re-elected. I will then continue to back him in whatever way I can from outside government."

Hurd did not say whether he intended to seek re-election to the House of Commons in the next national election, which must be held within two years.

He was Northern Ireland secretary from 1984 to 1985, and Home Secretary from 1985 to 1989, in charge of law and order and immigration services.

Hurd, a silver-haired former diplomat, had lost to Major in the race to succeed Thatcher in 1990. He was an old-fashioned Tory from the

paternalistic, benign, center-left wing of the party that Mrs. Thatcher overthrew in 1975.

The son and grandson of Conservative members of Parliament, Hurd was educated at Eton and Cambridge, where he received a first-class honours degree in history.

Hurd, who is fluent in Mandarin Chinese, joined the diplomatic service in 1952. He served in Beijing from 1954 to 1956.

While posted in Rome, he wrote his first thriller. He has had five more published since, and co-authored two others.

At the age of 36, he quit a fast-moving diplomatic career for politics. For six years he was political secretary to former Prime Minister Edward Heath.

Hurd and his second wife, Judith, his former secretary whom he married after a 1982 divorce, have two small children.

There are three adult sons by Hurd's first marriage.

Water talks today

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open agenda" and two sides will take up any issue that they consider of their interest.

"When two friends meet they discuss all issues of interest," he said.

Asked if he is optimistic about the outcome of the talks, the Indian Foreign Secretary said two sides have to keep addressing all the issues to their "maximum capacity" and in a spirit of "understanding and cooperation."

Answering a question if the water issue is bedevilling the ties, Haider said relations between two countries are good and the process on discussing the water issue continues.

Asked by an Indian journalist of Bangladesh's raising of the water issue at the international forums, he said Bangladesh is discussing the matter with India and his country is not averse to discussions.

Asked if the water issue is a political one and warrants political goodwill for its solution, the Indian Foreign Secretary said friendly relations exists between the two countries and that "there is no shortage of goodwill."

This is the first visit of Haider to Bangladesh as the foreign secretary of India. He was in Dhaka earlier on a couple of occasions in other capacities.

The Indian Foreign Secretary will have talks with Sobhan today spread over two sessions.

He may have talks again tomorrow morning prior to his departure for home in the afternoon.

One policeman

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average around 110 police personnel in a thana are available for checking crime and ensuring security. The rest 75 are kept engaged in various official duties.

The official said that it is sometimes very difficult to investigate crime incidents as the manpower is limited. Besides, the DMP is also suffering from inadequate logistic support such as vehicles, arms and communication equipment, he said.

Pairs at Dhaka Zoo

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Gipsy, the mother chimp, had to wait for years before getting her partner from London. Previously, she had shared her pen with her young daughter Munmun for years.

The 161 kg sea turtle, caught by fishermen in the Bay of Bengal in December 1994, died in the knee-deep pool of the zoo recently.

The deputy curator of the zoo said that despite efforts by experts, the turtle could not be saved.

The cause of the turtle's death was recorded as "head injury."

"People threw stones and it received a bad head injury, and it died," the deputy curator said.

The zoo officials further stressed that one of the biggest problems lay with a section of visitors who threw stones at the animals and poked them in different ways.

"We have hung signboards everywhere warning the visitors not to poke the animals, but that hardly works," said



Miss World Aishwarya Rai from India gets out of a car at the entrance to the Lanka Oberoi Hotel, shortly after her arrival in Colombo yesterday. She is on a three-day fund-raising visit. — AFP photo