

# DOWN TO EARTH

## Bane Of Tardy Office Files

By A S M Nurunnabi

Lately a slogan in the form of graffiti (wall writing) on some streets in Dhaka city has caught public attention. The slogan translated from Bangla somewhat reads like this: If it is terrorism to extort money by pointing a pistol at you, a similar crime is committed when an office file is held back for making illegal gain. Since normally, the walls of city streets bear mostly slogans of political nature, this particular slogan seemed somewhat different in character and, therefore, caused curiosity and some measure of discussion.

In the eyes of some observers, the slogan contains some elements of truth, judging from the present scenario in administration. While a terrorist extorts money openly with the threat of force, the picture is different with a public functionary who realises money in secret by holding back a file of necessary papers. The slogan seems to convey the message that the later category of persons may also be regarded as mastans (musclemen) wearing a "white collar".

The prevailing idea which carries some elements of grievance is that if you have any business to get done at any government ministry or department, you need to have a lot of patience and perseverance, besides the capacity for cajoling and flattery. In the common view, the all-important factor is greasing the palms of the persons concerned. Lack of responsibility and accountability is alleged to be the causative factor for this stay of affairs.

It is gathered that in the Secretariat Instructions, it is laid down that an Assistant Secretary can hold a file for 72 hours for examination and noting, a Deputy Secretary for 48 hours for his views and the higher level for 2 hours for decision. There was also a system for submitting periodic returns of pending files to higher authorities. All this seems to have been lost in limbo.

These instructions, framed

in earlier times, may appear unrealistic in the present state of things in view of the enormous increase of workload in many offices. In this context, need may be felt for revising such instructions. But none can deny that the existing trend seems to give unfettered latitude to the dealing officials at various levels to hold back a file for as long as he chooses, unless pressured by quarters at higher levels to set it moving or there is a quid pro quo arrangement to facilitate its movement.

Observers feel that, in view of the large-scale public complaints of excessive delay in disposal of files at different levels, a revised time-frame in the light of present-day realities should be drawn up, specifying the time-limit for dealing with a file at each level of hierarchy. Once that time-frame is adopted, the supervising officials should make it a point to strictly enforce it. If under any exceptional circumstances, a departure from the prescribed time-limit becomes necessary, a periodic list of such pending cases should be regularly placed before the head of the office, so that it may be possible to keep track of them for their expeditious disposal at a later stage. Some observers believe that in this way there are hopes of checking the present ominous trend of delay, either intentionally caused or otherwise, in the disposal of government business.

Any visitor to the Secretariat can find in a ministry or department stacks of files occupying a large part of office space. There are existing instructions for consigning the old important files to the Secretariat Record Room and for destroying the unimportant ones at specified intervals. Apparently from the glut of office files which can be seen in many offices in the Secretariat, it appears that those instructions are never followed. A Secretariat source confirms

this. This has led one observer to comment caustically that most of these files are fit for consignment to the Buriganga.

The chaotic situation has raised a vital issue. The accumulation of such large volumes of office files is not only inconsistent with our need for fast pace in technological advancement in the present age, but also detrimental to the cause of economic progress of our country. When the present ethos of slow processing and disposal of official business joins with forces of chaos and confusion created in the wilderness of accumulated office files, there is cause for anxiety that the development of the country in many sectors is likely to suffer.

In this context, the question of time economics arises. If the filing system is computerised, the task of tracing out a file could have been accomplished in a jiffy. Since in our case, the question of affordability is involved, the answer is a phased introduction of that system, initially covering the more important ministries and departments. As we stand on the threshold of the 21st century, there is no doubt that the vast technological prowess of computers is destined to become one of the fundamental requirements of man, as they will be the most helpful tools to meet the increasing demands for more productive use of time.

Against this background, the need for introducing computerised filing system network in the Secretariat offices even in a phased manner is felt to be very urgent by information technologists. If we look at the developed countries, we find even a grocery equipped with a computer, so, to meet the demands of time economics, it is in national interest to effect change in our outlook in the matter of efficient management of office records as early as possible.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin reacts during a news conference in Kremlin yesterday commenting on the role NATO is playing in Europe and the recent air strikes against Bosnian Serbs. (Story on Page 8)

## Bosnia: Peace accord

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creasing the "pain" to batter the Serbs into removing heavy weapons from around the Bosnian capital. UN officials said today.

Despite several days of bombing raids against Serb military installations, UN officials said there is no sign of the Bosnian Serb leadership caving into Western pressure to remove any of the estimated 300 heavy weapons from around Sarajevo.

In Naples, a NATO spokeswoman said the alliance had no plans to suspend its airstrikes against the Bosnian Serbs in the absence of any sign that they were complying with demands to withdraw their heavy weaponry around Sarajevo.

"The missions continued throughout the day yesterday and will continue all day today," said spokeswoman Anna Cansano.

UN military spokesman Chris Vernon told reporters at a morning briefing in Sarajevo that escalating the air campaign was "under consideration as we talk." He added that NATO had been "restraining (its) target lists to see if the (Bosnian Serbs) will react to a lower pain threshold."

NATO planes, he added, had already begun targeting roads and bridges in eastern Bosnia, a hilly and mountainous area with a pre-war Muslim majority that borders Serbia.

In Belgrade, news agencies said two people were killed and several more wounded following NATO raids overnight in eastern Bosnia, including Foca and Kalinovik.

Previously, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has restricted itself to "fixed military installations" such as arms dumps, command centre and anti-air defences.

"The idea is that much of the logistical elements that come up to support Sarajevo come from that direction. By hitting the lines of communication we devalue and reduce (the Bosnian Serbs) military capability around Sarajevo," Vernon said.

Bosnian Serb forces have besieged the city since June 1992, frequently targeting the streets when packed with civilians. Following an attack on a downtown market area last month, NATO and the UN Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) mounted an unprecedented campaign against the Serb military machine.

## Menon proposes extension of CHT ceasefire

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Sept 8: Rashed Khan Menon, leader of the Sub-committee on Hill Tracts Affairs and general secretary of the Workers Party, in a letter to Shanto Larma, president of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), parent organisation of Shantibahini, proposed the extension of ceasefire in CHT until the formation of next government after the general elections, highly placed sources said.

Menon also suggested to Larma to let the government know if he wanted to hold talks during the period, sources said.

Menon made the proposal in the backdrop of recent political development in the country. The letter was sent to Larma recently through liaison committee convenor Hongshadoz Chakma, the sources added.

The ongoing ceasefire, which is due to expire on September 30, was extended in the last peace talks held on July 12 at Dudukchhari border village under Khagrachhari hill district between the sub-committee led by Rashed Khan Menon and Shantibahini team headed by Shanto Larma.

## 2 held with 60 forged passports

By Staff Correspondent

A team of Detective Branch police recovered 60 forged passports, a range of different materials for forging visas and arrested two persons from a city residence Thursday.

A special squad of DB police raided the house at 10/1 Kollash Ghosh Lane under Kotwali thana and recovered the passports with photographs, stickers used in American visa, rubber seals of Indian and Malaysian visas, machine to insert passport number and various seals of different officials.

The arrested are Manik Das, 45, and Kaosar, 40. They were suspected to be members of an organised gang involved in forgery of passports, according to police.

## Indian troops kill 3 in Neelum Valley

MUZAFFARABAD, Sept 8:

At least three people were killed and four injured when Indian troops opened fire on civilians across the border, officials alleged here today, reports AFP.

The officials said the Indian troops resorted to "provoked" shelling on Thursday on a border township in Neelum Valley, some 50 kilometers (31 miles) from the state capital, Muzaffarabad.

The valley's 150,000 residents have been facing food shortages as supplies through routes rendered unsafe by frequent firing by Indian troops had dwindled since last November, they claimed.

The chief executive in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Sardar Abdul Quayum Khan, said the situa-

tion in the Neelum Valley was tense.

Skirmishes have routinely occurred along the so-called line of control, which divides the Indian and Pakistani-administered parts of Kashmir.

Since their independence from Britain in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought two of three wars over the ownership of the disputed Himalayan region.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training Muslim militants active in its part of Kashmir, Islamabad denies the charge while pledging political and moral support for the separatist Muslim revolt, which it sees as a legitimate movement for self-determination.

More than 12,000 people have died in the secessionist campaign since 1989.

## Beijing NGO Forum meet ends

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women is support for their reproductive rights. None has the right to impose reproductive restrictions on them, she said.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, in an open letter to the NGO Forum, congratulated the Women's Organisations on their vision and commitment. The Commissioner also hailed them for the work they have done for human rights for people everywhere in the world.

"The forum was a turning point in the women's movement," said Xu Zhijian, Chinese vice-president of the organising committee, at a closing news conference.

And veteran American feminist Bela Abzug said the turnout of 30,000 participants showed "the women's movement is alive and well and kicking."

There were hugs, tears and vows to meet again as women activists — famed feminists, lesbians, Roman Catholic nuns, prostitutes and little-known women rights campaigners — from more than 150 nations said farewell.

Departing delegates were given gifts and moon cakes, the rich pastry traditionally eaten during the Chinese mid-autumn festival.

Thai parliamentarian Supatra Masdit, convenor of the Non-Governmental Forum (NGO) on Women, declared the meeting a success.

"We all leave here with many lessons to reflect on,"

Supatra said. "Reports of human rights problems ... have marred the accomplishments of this gathering."

There was applause, though, when Supatra thanked the Chinese government and the people of China — and the ovation swelled when she mentioned the Chinese volunteers who helped to run the conference, and the people of Huairou.

Some participants, however, blasted what they called "unacceptable intrusions and interferences" by Chinese security.

Sunila Abeyasekera of Sri Lanka said a group formed by the Women's Human Rights Caucus would collect complaints about harassment and surveillance until the end of the UN gathering on Sept 15.

Many non-governmental representatives are staying on to lobby and observe the official conference.

At another news conference several women blamed the raucous portrayal of the forum on biased Western

## Jahanara Begum returns home

State Minister for Cultural Affairs Prof Jahanara Begum returned home yesterday after attending Bangladesh cultural festival in UK, reports UNB.

She led a 23 members cultural team that staged cultural programmes in four cities of UK, said a PID handout last night.

## The Midnight File

### Talks on to free Lankan ferry crew

COLOMBO, Sept 8: Negotiations continued today for the release of a ferry crew seized by Tamil guerrillas, but 121 others supposedly freed earlier still remained in rebel territory, official sources said. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continued to negotiate with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to free the eight crewmen of the government-chartered Iris Moana, but details were not available, the sources said, reports AFP.

### Al-Faran again threatens to kill hostages

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 8: Al-Faran guerrillas threatened today to kill four Western hostages in Kashmir unless the Indian government released an undisclosed number of jailed separatist militants by Saturday evening, reports Reuter.

"Al-Faran has issued a statement warning the government to announce the release of the people demanded by Saturday evening," the militant group said in a statement. "Otherwise the tourists will be killed."

The statement, delivered to local newspapers in Srinagar, said that if the tourists were killed, the Indian government would be solely responsible due to its "unyielding and irresponsible" attitude.

Al-Faran said it had no contact at present with either the government or Western diplomats from the three countries whose nationals were held hostage. But the statement said, "If the government agrees to our demands, there can be talks over the exchange of prisoners."

American Donald Hutchings, German Dirk Hasert and Britons Keith Mangan and Paul Wells were kidnapped in southern Kashmir in early July. A fifth hostage, Norwegian Hans Christian Ostroer, was found beheaded on August 13.

Al-Faran had previously demanded the release of 15 jailed militants in exchange for the hostages. Its latest statement did not say how many it wanted, a parcel bomb exploded in the British Broadcasting Corporation's office in Srinagar on Thursday, injuring three journalists, one critically.

Mushtaq Ali, a photographer for the French news agency Agence France Presse and cameraman for India's Asian News International, suffered extensive injuries to his head, chest and hands when he opened the package. Hospital officials said he was in critical condition and on a respirator.

Yusuf Jameel, who reports from Kashmir for the BBC and Reuters, was slightly injured in the blast as was photographer Habibullah Naqash who works for United News of India and the Asian Age newspaper.

The blast came two weeks after a Pakistani Islamic militant group attacked the BBC's office in Islamabad, beating two correspondents, smashing equipment and setting carpets and household items on fire.

### Power Cell

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year of the signing of the MOUs. If a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) is not made within a year, the MOUs would automatically be ineffective, if not mutually extended.

A source pointed out that even after six months of the beginning of the process of framing a model Power Purchase/Sale Agreement, nothing has been finalised in this regard.

In another development in the energy sector, US company Occidental Energy Ventures Corporation is likely to begin its seismic survey of 700 km area in straight measurement in the Sylhet-Netrokona region early next month to explore hydro-carbon reserves, Petrobangla sources said.

The Occidental had also signed an MOU with the government in April last for setting up a 300 MW gas-fired combined cycle power plant in Sylhet.

Another seismic survey by a British-Dutch joint venture in Sandwip, Sitakund and Semutang area, known as Block-15, is likely to begin in the last week of this month. British company Cairn Plc and Dutch company Holland Sea Search would survey over 400km area in straight measurement.

The Cairn Plc and Holland Sea Search would also begin an off-shore drilling in mid-November in the Bay of Bengal off the coast of Cox's Bazar-Sandwip region, known as Block-16. Before this, they would carry out a sight survey in the Bay, beginning by the end of this month, sources said, adding, this would be the country's first off-shore drilling for oil and gas.

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## New Sramik League leaders elected

By Staff Correspondent

Abdus Salam Khan, Rehan Uddin Rehan and Ahsanullah Master have been elected president, executive president and general secretary respectively of Jatiya Sramik League, labour front of Awami League, according to a press release here yesterday.

The new committee was announced yesterday.

Other office-bearers are: Vice-presidents — Fazul Haq Mantu, Shahjahan Khan, Habibur Rahman Siraj, Abdul Matin Master, M A Hamid and Sirajullah, joint secretaries — Roy Ramesh Chandra and Habibur Rahman Akanda and organisation secretary — Aminul Haq Faruq.

## Garments workers

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addressed by Shamsun Nahar, Shahin, Kazi Ruhul Amin, Shabana Rahman, Safia Parvin, Zafar Iqbal and Shahida Akter.

The leaders also demanded arrest and trial of the killers of garments worker Noor Rashida.

A fresh programmes announced at the rally to realise the demand include an organisational week from September 10, mass contact week from September 17, solidarity day on September 29 and 'lathi' procession on October 3.

## Hasina

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dhury, Ferdousi Majumder, Dr Inamul Haq, Dr Mazharul Islam, Prof Abdul Mannan Chowdhury and Tariq Anam.

Party leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Abdul Mamin, Zillur Rahman, Abdur Razzak, Tofael Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta and Begum Matia Chowdhury were also present among others.

Joins AL Commodore (ret'd) A Z Nizam and a union parishad chairman of Terkhada, Khulna, Abdur Razzak, joined Awami League yesterday.

They along with their followers met party chief Sheikh Hasina and expressed their alliance to the party.

Speaking on the occasion, Hasina said her party was in favour of building a strong and modern armed force.

## TCB to import lentil

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ward trend with the release of some 320 tons of Nepalese lentil in the market that encouraged the traders to off-load their stocks.

Price of lentil or masur dal rocketed to Tk 46 to Tk 48 per kg on the heels of the recent flood, but presently came down to Tk 36 to Tk 38 in retail markets in Dhaka.

The aim of TCB is to bring down the price of lentil. If needed, it will sell out the (imported) lentil at a loss," he said, indicating that the corporation might lower the price further.

Presently, the TCB's price of imported Nepalese lentil is Tk 34 per kg from its delivery godowns at Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal, Sylhet and Bogra.

"This is not the final price. We may lower it down after reviewing the market situation," Ahmed said, adding

## Transport workers clash in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Sept 8:

At least 12 people were injured in a clash between two rival groups of transport workers at Chala Bus Stand in Belkuchi thana today, reports UNB.

The clash between the rival transport workers took place at 7 this morning as a backlash of Thursday's altercation between two local bus owners, police said.

Local police said movement of local buses towards Sadar, Chowhali and Kamarkhand thana came to a halt following the clash in Belkuchi.

Among the injured, three people were admitted to Belkuchi Thana Health Complex.

## Footballer

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Signatories to the statement include: Abahani KC — Monem Munna, Sheikh Md Aslam, Shawpon, Dulal Hossain Dhanu, Hassan Al-Mamun, Md Mansur Ali, Partha Protim Kundu and Sohel. Mohammedan SC — Md Nurul Huq Manik, Jewel Rana, Ranjan Ahmed, Kazi Pervaz, Alamgir Hassan, Arman, Ruhul Amin and Alfaz.

Meanwhile, the day was also observed in the Chittagong city and elsewhere in the district with special emphasis on collective efforts of all quarters to implement the education programme for all by the year 2000.