

DOWN TO EARTH

City's Graffiti Craze

By A S M Nurunnabi

Wall-writing (graffiti) has a long tradition in our country. The tradition has worked as a drag on the clean facade of an urban area. Dhaka as the capital of the country has suffered the most in this respect. Wall-writing has been resorted to mainly for conveying political messages and slogans. The cause of optimum suffering of this city from this phenomenon arises from its being the hub of the country's political activities.

Wall-writing has become so pervasive that it constitutes one of the distressing aspects of our city life. The abominable disfiguration of the city's walls and buildings that it entails is a constant eyesore. It has been generally observed that these wall-writings were often executed in a crude manner with unsymmetrical and rough formation of the alphabetical letters carrying the messages. Lately some improvement is noticeable in this respect. This seems to be due to the factor that nowadays most of the wall-writings are done with the help of ready-made metal castings containing the alphabetical letters.

As already noted, in whatever form the wall-writings are executed, either crude or improved, the city landscape invariably suffers from their existence. From the sociological point of view, the phenomenon may be the reflection of a propensity of a class of people — low in standards of education, civic sense and public decency. This is not perhaps wholly true. Because the walls of the buildings on the Dhaka University campus — the premier seat of learning — suffer from the same malaise.

Since there appear to be no rules or regulations either from the municipal authorities or any other quarter, to regulate this unsightly aspect of city life, the propensity for resorting to this sort of activity for any cause, whatsoever, has been steadily on the increase. Previously under autocratic regimes, orders were issued to wipe out the

ugly signs. This bore some result for a temporary period. But the graffiti culture has been so much ingrained in us that it seems no amount of efforts backed by proper civic ethos will ever eliminate it completely. Election time has always given a boost to such activities. Since a general election is likely to take place in the near future, the city dwellers should be ready in advance for a deluge of election propaganda in the form of graffiti.

Lately a new trend is noticeable in the use of the city walls as vehicles of advertisements of various commercial products. We are used to seeing hoarding signs and billboards along the streets of the city as advertisement media. Now under the new trend which has just made a beginning, the entire space of a big portion of a wall is taken up for advertisement purposes. The trend seems to be steadily growing in the city. One of the reasons for this new trend may be that painting such advertisements of consumer products is more economical than setting up hoarding signs and billboards and such painted advertisement on walls are perhaps more durable and stable, not subject to uprooting by storms or cyclones. In one respect at least, these painted advertisements are less painful to the eye than the crudely executed graffiti with political import.

There is no denying that these aspects have an important bearing on the make-up of the city's look. In this context, there are complaints from some quarters that while the current movement for beautifying the city is in progress, it is disheartening the Dhaka City Corporation rampantly giving permission to set up large hoarding signs and billboards which tend to cover up beautiful views of landscape along some important roads of the city. If one takes a ride from the road junctions at Shahbagh Avenue towards the buildings of the Roads and Highways Depart-

ment, he can see for himself how the large billboards on both sides of this busy road have blocked out beautiful views of the Ramna Park and the Suhrawardy Uddyan. The same situation is noticeable on the stretch of road running from the Ramna Police Station to Kakrail church, and also on Rajuk Avenue in Motijheel and Gulshan Avenue. One observer expressed apprehension that very soon the beautiful Airport Road from Mohakhali to Uttara might be covered by large billboards, thereby obstructing the sight of beautiful tree line that runs along this highway.

It is understood that in Singapore, construction of hoarding signs and billboards which stand in the way of beautiful views of landscapes and open spaces is strongly discouraged. It is felt that we need to follow similar example, only allowing exception in cases to cover up unsightly areas.

If we seriously mean to make a success of our movement to beautify the city, one essential factor seems to be for the City Corporation to consider the feasibility of removing the obstructing billboards standing in the way of beautiful landscapes in the city. This perspective may be kept in view in planning future vista. If it were not for our power shortage, the beautifying effect on city panorama at night would have been heightened substantially if the advertisers were encouraged to put up more neon signs at strategic locations.

Another imperative necessity in this context is to devise suitable ways and means of tackling the graffiti problem in the city. A prohibitory regulation by the civic authorities carrying stiff penal provisions against the sponsors of random placement of graffiti may be an answer. But at least provision may be made so that no graffiti is allowed in certain specified areas of the city in the interest of aesthetic considerations.



The visiting British parliamentary delegation led by Peter Shore called on Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at her party's Dhanmondi office yesterday. — AL photo

Tigers torch two oil depots in Colombo

COLOMBO, Oct 20: Sri Lanka vowed to defeat Tamil Tiger rebels after the guerrillas today torched the country's biggest two oil storage depots and fought street battles which left at least 29 people dead, reports AFP.

Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte told parliament that Tamil Tiger guerrillas launched pre-dawn rocket attacks against two oil depots in the capital and set off an unprecedented inferno from which thousands of residents fled.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is fighting for a separate state embracing the northern and eastern regions for Sri Lanka's two million minority Tamils and has been blamed for several bomb attacks here in the capital.

Ratwatte said the fires at the Kolonnawa tank farm and the Orugodawatte crude oil storage were contained 12 hours after the blaze began.

Energy officials said India's state-run oil and natural gas commission (ONGC) was sending a team of firefighters to ensure that the fire at four storage tanks at Kolonnawa did not spread to the other 43 tanks there.

At the Orugodawatte crude oil facility, all three storage

tanks containing 90,000 tonnes of crude were still in flames and the fire was expected to last several days.

"Just because Kolonnawa (oil depot) is in flames we are not going to change our plans. I give a solemn assurance that we will take Jaffna," Ratwatte said.

The LTTE maintain their de facto state in the northern Jaffna peninsula where security forces have been mounting pressure in recent weeks at heavy cost for both sides.

Ratwatte said the LTTE will not succeed in blunting the military advance on Jaffna by resorting to terrorist attacks.

JAKARTA, Oct 20: Two earthquakes, both less than five on the Richter scale, were felt on Indonesia's Sumatra island today, the meteorology and geophysics agency said, reports Reuter.

The first at 5:33 am (22:33 GMT Thursday), measured 4.4 on the Richter scale and was centred in the Indian Ocean 90 km (55 miles) south of Padang in West Sumatra, the agency said in a statement.

Peter Shore meets Hasina

The visiting British parliamentary delegation led by Peter Shore called on Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at her Dhanmondi residence yesterday, reports UNB.

They discussed matters of mutual interest, said a party press release.

Other members of the delegation are Edward Rowlands MP and Michael John Gapes MP.

British High Commissioner in Bangladesh Peter J. Fowler and Awami League leaders Abdus Samad Azad and Abul Hasan Chowdhury were present.

Raphel to visit India, Pakistan next month

NEW DELHI, Oct 20: The diplomat in charge of US policy in South Asia plans to visit India and Pakistan next month amid worries in New Delhi that Washington has tilted towards Islamabad, reports Reuter.

US and Indian officials said today Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Robin Raphel tentatively planned to arrive in New Delhi from Pakistan in the first week of November.

Her anticipated visit would come at a time of rising tensions between India and Pakistan.

The Midnight File

Columbia blasts off

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. Oct 20: Space shuttle Columbia blasted off at 9:53 am (13:53 GMT) today, finally shaking off three weeks of difficulties that caused its launch to be delayed six times. Columbia began a 16-day voyage dedicated to science that will be NASA's second-longest mission ever, reports Reuter.

Week-long hartal

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tact programme during the rest of the current month".

He, however, said that the party leaders would meet again this morning to finalise the package of agitation to be announced from the public rally in the afternoon.

Earlier, top leaders of the Awami League (AL), the Jatiya Party (JP) and the Jamaat-e-Islami had a two-hour meeting yesterday afternoon to discuss the Opposition's next course of action.

Held at the residence of Abdus Samad Azad, the meeting was attended by, among others, Tofael Ahmed and Mohammad Nasim of the AL, Anwar Hossain Monju and Moudud Ahmed of the JP and Abdul Kader Mollah of the Jamaat. The meeting reviewed the latest political situation.

The option for "a non-stop hartal until the Opposition demand is met" was also discussed. JP secretary general Anwar Hossain Monju told The Daily Star last night.

The Opposition has, meanwhile, enforced a 96-hour hartal across the country from October 16 to press its demand for holding general elections under a non-party caretaker government.

"If the parties concerned can reach an understanding, the gherao would be enforced sometime this month, while the non-stop hartal would take effect next month", the JP secretary general said.

The leaders are scheduled to meet at 10:00 this morning to finalise the programme.

While reviewing the political situation, the leaders attending the meeting unanimously felt that success of the 96-hour hartal, the longest ever shutdown in the country, proved that the people had support for the Opposition demand for a caretaker government.

The leaders generally agreed that the Opposition was now left with no option, especially after the four-day hartal, but to go for more aggressive programmes. "Programmes with less intensity would fail to create adequate impact," a leader attending the meeting said. "We are, however, aware of the sufferings of the commonman," he added.

Clinton RB results

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viser Samuel Berger called "a fairly intense 72 hours," he will also give a major speech to the UN General Assembly.

With his wife Hillary, Clinton on Sunday night will meet leaders of Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mongolia and Denmark — countries which Mrs Clinton visited this year.

Clinton's scheduled 1-1/2-hour meeting with Jiang on Tuesday follows gradual warming in US-Chinese relations after a deep plunge precipitated by the US decision to give Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui a visa to visit his former university.

When Clinton meets Yeltsin on Monday at Hude Park, New York, birthplace of former President Franklin Roosevelt, issues will include possible Russian participation in a NATO force that would enforce any peace accord in Bosnia.

In his address on Sunday to the General Assembly, he is expected to urge reform of its bureaucracy and promise he is doing all he can to repay 1.4 billion dollar in US arrears.

38,151 students out of 79,197 students passed; and 5,476 out of 11,164 students passed in commerce group.

Rokan-ul-Hasan of Bogra Cantonment Public School and College topped the merit list of science group. He secured 969 marks with letters in mathematics, physics, chemistry and statistics.

He was followed by Jaki Md Hassan Sharif Azmi of Rangpur Cadet College securing 932 marks with letters in mathematics, physics, chemistry and engineering drawing. Niloy Rahaman of Pabna Cadet College stood third securing 930 marks with letters in mathematics, physics, chemistry and eng. drawing.

Abdul Karim of Rajshahi College topped the merit list of humanities group securing 888 marks with letters in geography, logic, psychology, and statistics.

Zobaida Sultana and Masudul Zaman of the same college stood second and third securing 837 marks with letters in psychology and geography and 820 marks with letters in logic, psychology and SNK respectively.

Tahura Pervin of Nijam Uddin Azgar Ali College, Sunjanagar topped the merit list of commerce group securing 795 marks with letters in bookkeeping and statistics.

Abdus Salam and Debo-brata Kumar Sarkar both from Rajshahi College stood second and third securing 766 and 763 marks respectively with letters in statistics.

NAM summit

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pale and tired as he sat through several hours of speeches on Wednesday by non-aligned heads of state and government. Just before leaving on Thursday, he spoke briefly to Colombian reporters, his voice noticeably hoarse.

Accidents

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The bodies were handed over to relatives after autopsy at Bogra Mohammad Ali Hospital.

In another accident on the Bogra-Nagarbari highway, Bogra Deputy Commissioner Shafiqul Karim and the ADC (Gen) of Bogra were seriously injured when their jeep fell into a roadside ditch at Majhira in Sadar thana of Bogra district.

Both were admitted to Bogra CMH.

Police said they met with the accident at about 11 am while they were going towards Ariabazar to visit the spot where Assistant Commissioner Newaz Ali and another man was killed earlier in the morning.

GOC of Bogra Cantonment Maj Gen Helal Morshed, DC, Sirajganj Syed Abdul Malek and SP Golam Mostafa visited the accident spot.

Our DMCH Correspondent reports: A Chinese restaurant owner in the city, Ali Reaz and driver Selim died on the spot and Habibur Rahman Milon, assistant editor of the daily Ittefaq and Firoz, an Awami League member of Brahmanbaria were injured when their car collided with a mini-bus at Baria on Dhaka-Narisingdhi road.

Habibur Rahman Milon, was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital from where he was shifted to a private clinic, while Firoz was admitted to Orthopedic Hospital.

Milon and the three others were on their way to Brahmanbaria to attend a public meeting there held yesterday protesting the killing of Chhatra League leader Sheikh Shah Newaz during the 96-hour hartal.

SL outclass

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being bowled out in 47.3 overs.

Aravinda de Silva, the delightful Sri Lankan stroke-player, was named man-of-the-final for his electrifying innings of 50 off just 34 deliveries.

Opener Roshan Mahanama, who has been consistent with the willow throughout the tournament, was declared man-of-the-series.

The elegant right-handed batsman has scored a century and two half centuries on his way to compile 291 runs in four innings, including a sparkling 66 in yesterday's final of the triangular meet which also included Pakistan.

US food aid

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meeting has already met Senator Hank Brown, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Sub-committee for South Asian Affairs, to secure his (Brown) assistance for the write-off.

The Copenhagen Social Summit, 1995, also requested the donor countries to write-off the outstanding debts of the LDCs to give them a chance to start afresh. According to finance ministry sources the government would persuade the US government on this line.

Bangladesh received food aid under three titles I, II and III under Title I and part of Title III, Bangladesh used to get food loan. Now the country only receives US food grants.

Garments: Safety measures

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If false fire alarms can kill, is it too difficult to imagine the consequences of a real fire? Case studies conducted at BUET show that in some city garment factories, the number of deaths due to a fire could be in their hundreds. And, this is not a false alarm.

Garments workers have died because they were unable to escape to a place of safety during the emergencies. In the ensuing panic-propelled stampede, escapees were trampled to death. Those unable to escape were initially overcome by smoke and noxious gases, succumbing primarily due to lack of oxygen.

Most garment factories are time bombs for a potential fire disaster. The factory floor and the escape route are crammed with work-tops and combustible materials. The risk of fire being ignited is omnipresent due to improper wiring and electrical design, illegal connections, and careless smoking and heating habits.

The hazard is multiplied because (a) the narrow exits are often locked, (b) the large illiterate working force is without any fire training or drill, (c) there is no trained personnel to take charge and dispel panic during emergencies, (d) the building has been subjected to unauthorised change, (e) the waste products are not disposed off properly, (f) adequate fire-fighting equipment is not provided and (g) water is forever scarce.

Escape in cases of emergency is difficult as garment factories are being housed in multi-storied buildings with only one narrow staircase. Although, options of multiple doorways and staircases exist in some buildings, most management keep only about 25 inches of doorway and collapsible gate, and one staircase open during shifts.

According to acceptable standards the maximum travel distance for any occupant to a place of safety should be 30-45 metre, the travel distance far exceeds the safe limits. In almost all

the garments factories, the travel distance is lengthened because of the layout as workers would have to travel round machine lines to reach the exit.

In order to avoid suffocation and burns, inmates must reach a place of safety within 2.5 minutes of a fire starting. Owners must ensure by design that adequate number of "unlocked" doors of requisite size are located strategically. If the owners fear pilferage by employees, they have only to spend more on security by employing more guards for the extra vigil. Alternative escape routes, albeit in the form of optional doors and staircases should be provided lest one should be made

'PM's proposal won't ensure fair polls'

Jatiya Party Secretary General Anwar Hossain Manju yesterday said the Prime Minister's proposed interim government will not ensure the people's independent rights to vote.

Talking to UNB, Manju said Begum Zia's proposed 10-member interim cabinet is neither possible within the ambit of the present Constitution, nor it will ensure free and fair voting.

The Prime Minister said Thursday that the five opposition nominees can be elected through bye-election and then inducted in the cabinet along with five BNP nominees.

'Human chain'

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harmony.

The organisers, in a press release, said that the people could no longer accept the situation created by the political leadership. They also alleged that the political leadership hardly had any respect for the rights of the citizens.

They called upon the political leaders to immediately find out a way to resolve the crisis.

inaccessible during a fire or other emergencies. Occupants should not need to pass through smoke, heat or fire in order to reach a place of safety.

High-risk factories should be compartmented so that fire and/or smoke do not spread between floors through open staircases, or from one end of a large floor to another; thus allowing workers to escape.

Workers have agitated against the Chief Inspector of Factories on 14 August in demand of safer work places and compensation for the victims of the Lusaka incident. This is an attempt by vested quarters to divert the issue. Against this backdrop, it must however be understood that the owners of garment, or for that matter any other factory, are primarily responsible for ensuring a safe work place. It is the failure of the Chief Inspectorate and the Fire Service that legislation is not being implemented.

The Fire Service is putting the blame squarely on the Lusaka factory building owner. If the staircases are narrow, factory owners should not rent such places. If, on inspection, the Fire Service finds the staircases narrow, it should not grant the safety certificate. Firemen have blamed the new Lusaka factory for not having sought their approval. Ironically, there are hundreds, nay thousands, of factories which have the Fire Service approval but none of those conform to the legal and/or safety requirements.

The garments sector is a global pride of Bangladesh. It has many obvious enemies. If the frequency of fatal fire incidents increase, envious overseas competitors will take this up as yet another damaging issue. Notwithstanding the international pressure, safety standards in our garments factories should improve because the owners owe it to their highly loyal workers as a moral responsibility.

The Lusaka factory deaths due to panic set off by a false fire alarm are ominous signs. Effective and quick measures must be taken at government, BGMEA, Fire Service and individual factory owners levels to prevent a catastrophe. Anything short of this, we are awaiting a national tragedy.



The Bangladesh Jatiyatibadi Jubo Dal brought out an anti-hartal procession in the city yesterday. — Star photo

NATO Secy-Gen Willy Claes resigns

BRUSSELS, Oct 20: Willy Claes resigned today as NATO Secretary General after the Belgium parliament lifted his immunity so he could face charges in a corruption scandal, diplomatic sources said, reports AFP.

He handed his resignation in at a meeting with the 16 NATO ambassadors at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels, the sources said.

After months of controversy that have dogged the 56-year-old Claes at a crucial time for NATO, 97 members of the 150-seat Parliament approved a recommendation Thursday that Claes be stripped of his immunity as a former Belgian government minister. He faces possible charges in two bribery scandals dating to when he held Belgium's economics portfolio in the late 1980s.

The accusations had dogged Claes at a crucial time for NATO as it faces further involvements in former Yugoslavia and Russian opposition to plans to expand into eastern Europe.

The voting by secret ballot came after Claes went before parliament in 11th-hour bid to plead his innocence, and also try to save his job as political head of the world's most powerful military alliance.

The chamber has decided that there are enough indications to order a referral of Claes to the Cour de Cassation and to enable a continuation of the investigation. Raymond Langendries, president of the lower house, said

after the vote.

Claes pleaded his case before the assembly, vehemently denying any wrong doing in the affair that has dogged him throughout his turbulent one-year tenure at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

"I am totally innocent. I asked at least to have the elementary right of defence," a grim-faced Claes told reporters successively in Dutch, French and English after his appearance.

20 hurt as JCD rivals clash in Sherpur

SHERPUR, Oct 20: At least 20 people were injured, three of them seriously, in a clash between two rival groups in Nalitabari thana today, reports UNB.

Witnesses said supporters of the two groups used hockey sticks, ram dao and other lethal weapons in the clash that started at about 7:30 pm. Some shops were ransacked during the clash.

Seriously injured Abdul Khaleq was sent to My-mensingh Medical College Hospital while Ratan and Hafiz were admitted to Nalitabari Health Complex.

Local traders blamed two factions of the Jatiyatibadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) for the trouble and called for a half-day hartal tomorrow (Saturday).

Jubo Dal brings out anti-hartal procession

The Jubo Dal Dhaka Metropolitan City unit brought out a procession yesterday afternoon in protest against the opposition 'conspiracy' to impede the progress of the country through hartal and chaos, reports BSS.

The procession passed through Bijoynagar, Paltan, Gullistan, Nawabpur Road, Rathkhola, English Road and Bangshal Road and ended at Golapshah Mazar.

The procession was led by Commerce and Information Minister M Shamsul Islam, Posts and Telecommunications Minister Tariqul Islam, Jubo Dal president Mirza Abbas and its general secretary Goyeswar Roy.

The Muslim-led government army's elite 5th corps met a delegation from the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) near Sanski Most, a town captured by the government side just before the truce went into force last Thursday.

Bosnian warring factions agree to honour truce

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia, Oct 20: Bosnian government, Bosnian Serb and local Croat military teams met in north-west Bosnia today under UN auspices and agreed to honour a ceasefire that has been largely ignored in the area, reports Reuter.

Representatives of the Muslim-led government army's elite 5th corps met a delegation from the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) near Sanski Most, a town captured by the government side just before the truce went into force last Thursday.