

DOWN TO EARTH

Life of Women Slum Dwellers

By A S M Nurunnabi

In the last two decades, there has been a change in the pattern of migration of people from rural to urban areas in their search for means of survival. At the initial stage, mainly male members of the rural families used to make such migration. Many of such families used to have some cultivable land in the villages, however small it may be and most of them had at least some homestead land in the villages. At that time, the stay of the male members of these families in urban areas for eking out a living was for temporary periods. They kept their links with their village homes and some of them harboured the hope of returning to their villages, should their economic conditions improve by working in urban areas. Towns and cities were their temporary abode for earning a living, and not for permanent settlement.

The trend of migration of a whole rural family to an urban area came about at a later stage. It conveyed implications of laundresses of the migrating families. Behind such migration loomed the destitution of such families brought on by frequent floods, cyclones, river erosion, etc. The growing breakdown of the rural economy and the attraction of better facilities in urban areas operated as the push and pull factors of migration. For most of such migrating families, there remained no prospect of return to their villages where their homestead lands have been lost on account of their continuing poverty.

Lately, a new trend in migration pattern has been in evidence. The distressed and oppressed women of the villages have been found to be

setting such a trend. The new trend in migration of women is mainly guided by economic factors, no doubt. But it has been observed that a woman takes decision to leave her village mainly to escape the oppressive social milieu created by the male dominance in rural society. In this context the widows, divorced women and women separated from their husbands come under this category. When these classes of women are made helpless and destitute in the unfavourable social ethos coupled with the poor rural economy, they find no alternative but to move to urban areas as a means of escape from their unhappy situations. After they reach an urban area, their foremost concern is to look for some kind of shelter. In this search, they end up living in urban slums.

Thus, the women of migrating families with husbands and children and the distressed widows and divorced women from villages constitute the bulk of the female population in city slums. Hard economic realities, exacerbated by a breakdown in social norms and mores force the slum women to quit their traditional 'hearth-side' chores and venture into the age-old preserve of paid physical labour such as cutting and carrying earth and bricks and mortar. Some of them find work as domestic help in city homes, while others run small business of some kind or get engaged in producing handicrafts on a small scale. Lately, more fortunate among them find employment in city's garment factories.

The impact of the garments industry is largely felt

in the life of women in city slums. Such women workers acquire some measure of dignity by their work in factories and enjoy a great degree of independence on account of their comparatively more stable income.

The daily life of women living in slums is beset with many serious problems. These are mainly related to supplies of gas, electricity, water and toilet facilities. There are many slums which do not have any toilet facility for the tenants. For the women living therein, their suffering can only be imagined. Many slums are without water supply, electric and gas facilities. The burden of carrying water from a nearby tubewell or water tap is borne by the women.

Some NGOs are active in dealing with the problems of women slum dwellers. To help them become self-reliant or earn additional income by engaging in some small-scale business or handicrafts, they provide soft-term loans. Some feel that women in city slums may also be helped with loans on the model followed by the Grameen Bank in the villages.

The bottom line is that as citizens of the country, the slum dwellers have also some specific civic rights. The objective should be how we can integrate these rights in the framework of a truly democratic and welfare-oriented society and reach their benefits to the slum dwellers at large — particularly in such areas as supply of water, gas, electricity and sanitary facilities till we are in a position to deal effectively with the multi-faceted problems of city slums under planned development schemes.



The Awami League brought out a procession in the city yesterday demanding elections under a caretaker government. — Star photo

US federal workers face uncertainty over partial pay

WASHINGTON, Dec 29: The partial government shutdown won't end until Congress and President Clinton reach a deal that would balance the budget in seven years, but the impasse could be over in a few days if all sides are willing, House Speaker Newt Gingrich says, reports AP.

"If there's a will to get it done, it's a two- or three-day negotiation," Gingrich said Thursday. "If the president will work with us tomorrow we can get this solved by early next week."

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole and Gingrich planned to meet with Clinton Friday afternoon, following two days of staff negotiations and a meeting Friday morning between congressional budget leaders and White House officials.

"I'm hopeful," Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici, a New Mexico Republican, said in a telephone interview. "None of us are giving up on getting a balanced budget, and there's

a sense of urgency to it." Congress is scheduled to begin a new session on Wednesday. Gingrich said that if an agreement is reached by Wednesday morning the government could be fully open and federal bills could be getting paid by afternoon.

But he ruled out reopening the partially closed government in the meantime. "I don't think, in the House, we can get agreement to do that," he said.

Dole suggested that Clinton reconsider the several spending bills he has vetoed. Signing them would allow the agencies they would fund to reopen, Dole said, and provisions the president doesn't like could be worked out as part of the budget agreement.

In reaching that agreement, Dole stressed, "there's got to be give and take on both sides."

Gingrich said he understood the personal cost of the partial shutdown to federal employees, who begin-

ning Friday will receive truncated paychecks if they work for an unfunded agency. Gingrich, after an earlier meeting with the president, had broached the idea of reopening the government while talks continued, but the freshmen rebelled, and Clinton implied that the speaker had lost control of his troops.

Even quick passage of an emergency spending bill would not save most of the 760,000 workers in unfunded agencies from receiving partial pay Friday or next week, because the checks have been processed.

The paychecks cover the December 10-23 period, and employees will be paid for their work before the partial shutdown began. The 760,000 includes 480,000 "excepted" workers who remain on the job in unfunded agencies, and 280,000 on furlough.

If no temporary spending bill is passed by January 8, those employees face the possibility of no paycheck in two weeks.

The Midnight File

Kashmiri leader taken into Karachi police custody

KARACHI, Dec 29: A leading Kashmiri activist was taken into custody by police here today and issued an expulsion order from the southern Sindh province because of his "inflammatory speeches," officials said. Mast Gul, a leader of the Hizbul Mujahideen in Indian Kashmir escaped to Pakistan earlier this year, evading arrest by Indian authorities during an operation in the Kashmiri town of Charar-e-Sharif, reports AFP.

49 more arms recovered

Law enforcing agencies recovered 49 firearms, 121 bullets and 81 explosives, up to the morning of yesterday, the ninth day of the nationwide hunt for illegal arms ahead of the general elections, reports UNB.

According to the Election Commission, they also arrested 806 people on charges of various crimes including unauthorised possession of arms.

The law enforcing agencies are conducting the combined operation to pick up illegal arms to ensure a secure environment for holding the next elections in a free and fair manner.

Indira Cong

Chavan were informed that three planes loaded with arms were ready at the Karachi Airport for two months for dropping them at a place near Purulia. He said the arms were dropped some 50 km away from the site given by the intelligence agencies.

Jatiya Party

League president Kazi Abdul Kader, President of Jatiya Gananatrik Party Shafiul Alam Pradhan, Jamiat Ulemaye Islam Mufti Moulana Mohammed Wakkas, President of Progotishil Jatiyatubadi Dal Sheikh Showkat Hossain Nilu, President Gonotantik Karmi Shibir Comrade Nurul Huq Mehd, Advocate Mujibul Huq Huru of Jatiya Janata Party and Moulana Hemayetuddin of Islami Shashantantra Andolon attended the meeting.

The meeting observed that the BNP is going ahead with its blue-print to hold an unilateral election by ignoring the demand of the people and the political parties for a caretaker government to hold the election.

It urged Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to resign immediately to create an atmosphere for a meaningful discussion with the opposition.

Accept Opposition demand, Moni urges govt

Dissident BNP leader Nurul Islam Moni yesterday urged Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to accept the Opposition demand for polls under a caretaker government.

In a statement, Moni, former BNP member of the parliament from the Barguna-2 Constituency, said that a little more sincerity from both the PM and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina could now help overcome the narrowed-down differences.

"Madam Prime Minister, if the whole country is pushed towards disaster, the economy is shattered and the democracy is doomed," Moni said.

Govt borrowings

From Page 1
crease by Tk 276.64 crore to Tk 42488.94 crore.

According to an analysis by the research wing of the Bangladesh Bank, this expansionary impact was caused by an increase in credits both in the private and public sectors coupled with a decrease in time deposits.

The total domestic credits till October 19 of this fiscal year increased by Tk 1787.42 crore or 4.95 per cent to Tk 37872.72 crore. During the corresponding period of last year, total credit decreased by Tk 801.46 crore or 2.61 per cent, according to a provisional estimate of the Bangladesh Bank.

Private sector lending increased by Tk 1114.53 crore or 4.3 per cent till October 19 this year as against a decrease of Tk 8.66 crore or 0.04 per cent last year.

"It is the public sector's borrowing from the banking system that has contributed largely to domestic credit expansion in the recent months," said Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, a leading economist. "This is in sharp contrast with the experience of the previous fiscal when domestic credit expansion was led by an increase in private sector credit."

Hasina

From Page 1
against the ruling BNP and said if the present government did not meet the demands of the people, "we shall force it to resign, through our movement."

The AL president urged the people to make a success of the party programmes of barricade today and 48-hour hartal on January 3 and 4.

With city AL leader Reazuddin Ahmed in the chair, the meeting was also addressed by Mofazzal Husain Chowdhury Maya, Akhterul Alam, Quamrul Islam and Fayezeuddin Mia.

UNB adds: Meanwhile, Awami League leaders yesterday reiterated that the next "farcical elections without the participation of the Opposition" would be resisted at any cost.

"There is no use killing time in the name of talks... the BNP has to accept the demand for a caretaker government and give enough time to the Opposition to prepare for the elections," Amir Hossain Amu told a party rally at the Bangabandhu Avenue in the afternoon.

He said the opposition parties demanded resignation of the government 90 days ahead of the general elections and also at least three elections under a neutral non-party caretaker government.

Abdur Razzak alleged that the government was trying to make a mockery of the elections and killing time on different pretexts. "People will resist the conspiracy and force the government to accept the caretaker demand," he said.

Tofael Ahmed accused the government of trying to consolidate its stay in power, somehow holding an election. "But the people will not allow any such sham elections of blueprint," he said.

Tourism

From Page 1
The private tour operators do not come forward in developing travel spots and other facilities because that requires huge investment and "sometimes it is not cost-effective," said a tour operator.

In global perspective, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) recorded 528 million tourist arrivals worldwide in 1994 against only 25 million in 1950. The ever-increasing number of tourists will up as high as 937 million in 2010, the WTO forecasts.

The turnover from tourism excluding air fares worldwide was only 210 crore US dollars in 1950, which jumped to 32,146 crore US dollars last year. Tourism has become the single largest employer in the world, accounting for over 120 million jobs worldwide.

WASA

From Page 1
authorities promised to the unions to fulfil some of their five-point demands which include accommodation to employees and pension. However no agreement was reached regarding contracting out the jobs in the two zones. Other WB conditions are improvement in sanitation and twinning programme, enactment of a new WASA ordinance and appointment of a new Board and Chairman, reduction of total arrears to no more than five months' billing and appointment of a Managing Director of WASA on contract basis.

A WASA ordinance was promulgated a few weeks ago paving way for appointment of a new Board, a Chairman and a Managing Director.

Regarding the reduction of total arrears to no more than five months' billing, the WASA made little progress till last month when the unions kept on resisting collection of bills. However, last month, they agreed to gear up collection and the arrears have now been reduced to 10 months' from the previous 12 months'. These arrears amount to about Tk 70 crore.

Meanwhile, validity of the French grant of 152.7 million francs equivalent to 18 per cent of the project cost, to build one of the four components of the 50 IMG Saidabad plant will expire this month. Although the government has requested for extension of the deadline, the French government is yet to reply.

Dhaka Book Fair '96 begins Jan 1

The fortnight-long Dhaka Book Fair '96 begins on January 1 with the participation of renowned publishers and book dealers from home and abroad, reports BSS.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the book fair at 11:30 am on the day, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Prof Jahannara Begum told a press conference in the city yesterday.

Organised by National Book Centre of Bangladesh, the fair will be held at the open ground of army museum adjacent to Bjoy Swarnoi. A total of 124 organisations from China, India, the UK, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the host country will take part in the fair.

Prof Jahannara Begum said that the fair was being organised as part of the government decision to celebrate National Book Day and National Book Week from January 1 to 7 every year. Besides, similar fairs were also being arranged in different district headquarters of the country.

Prof Jahannara Begum said that in the field of book trading, the country had made some breakthrough.

During 1992-93 fiscal Bangladesh exported books worth Taka 27 lakh to India alone. Besides, Bangladesh sends books valued about Taka 20 lakh last year to Calcutta book fair only.

The fair will remain open for public from 11 am to 8:30 pm everyday. But only on Friday, the fair will remain closed from 12:30 to 2 pm. The entry fee for the fair has been fixed at Taka two per person.

But the schoolchildren in

Jyoti Basu advised rest

The West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu is suffering from back ache and has been advised rest by doctors till December 31, official sources said yesterday, reports PTI.

Basu, who has been unable to attend his Writers Building's chamber for the last two days, has been going through important files at his Salt Lake residence.

He also met delegations from China and Bangladesh at his residence. Basu has cancelled all his engagements till December 31.

PM's donation for Nuban's family

The Prime Minister will donate Tk one lakh to the family of late Nuban Ahmed, a young teacher of the Economics Department of Dhaka University, reports BSS.

Nuban died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) a few days ago following injuries inflicted on him by some miscreants near the Sangsad Bhaban.

The Prime Minister decided to donate the amount when Vice-Chancellor of the Dhaka University Prof Emajuddin Ahmed contacted her yesterday, according to a university press release.

A meeting of the Dhaka University Syndicate here on Thursday entrusted the vice-chancellor with the responsibility of requesting the Prime Minister to help the family of late Nuban Ahmed.

Earlier, the authorities of the Dhaka University also decided to donate Tk one lakh to the family of Nuban.

DUTA strike

From Page 1
demanded transfer of the case to the Detective Branch for investigation.

Nuban Ahmed died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital Tuesday last after he was stabbed by muggers on December 17 at the South Plaza of the Sangsad Bhaban.

The press conference was addressed by DUTA president Dr TAM Zahurul Haque, while general secretary Dr Emmamul Haq and other teachers including Dr AAMS Arefin Siddique, Prof Shahada Ali and Prof AK Azad were present.

Dr Haque claimed that some other senior teachers of the university were threatened by terrorists on the same day Nuban was stabbed. The incidents might be linked he claimed but declined to disclose the names of the teachers threatened for security reasons.

He also alleged that Nuban's treatment at the hospital was not satisfactory despite repeated demands of DUTA. He was kept in the hospital without treatment for hours, he alleged.

The DUTA proposed shifting of Nuban's family from Mohammadpur to the residential area of the DU for their security and a job for Nuban's wife in the university.

DUTA also proposed to give Nuban the best teacher award posthumously.

The DUTA also decided to give two days salary of the teachers to Nuban's family which will be about Taka 6 lakh. The DUTA also proposed to form a memorial fund for Nuban Ahmed.

Dostam blames Kabul govt for Peshawar blast

ISLAMBABD, Dec 29: Afghanistan's Uzbek leader General Abdul Rashid Dostam has blamed the Kabul government for last week's car bombing in Peshawar, which killed dozens of people, the Foreign Office here said Thursday, reports AFP.

The allegation came in a condolence message sent by Dostam to Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

"The sabotage activity was carried out by the illegitimate and widely defamed Kabul regime which was not sincere to its own country," Dostam said in his message, which was released here by the Foreign Office.

The explosion killed 45 people and injured 100, according to official media. Unofficial figures put the toll at 60 killed and 200 injured.

The Uzbek general, who heads the National Islamic Movement (Junbish Milli) from his base at Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan, denounced the "terr-

orist and inhuman activities of the Kabul regime." The Pakistan government has not publicly accused Kabul of involvement in the December 21 car bombing in Peshawar, though officials have expressed such suspicions.

Police are looking for a prime suspect, identified as Persian-speaking Abdul Mateen, and another Afghan.

Workers of the ferry jumped into the river but failed to trace him immediately. They continued their frantic search for an hour only to find a dead Monajat.

He left behind his wife, one son, two daughters and a host of friends and relatives of mourn his death.

Before joining the Janakantha, he worked for more than 18 years in the daily Sangbad, nine years in the daily Azad and five years in other national dailies.

His namaaj-janaza will be held at Keramatia Mosque in his home town Rangpur after Asr prayers today. He will be buried at the Munshipara graveyard.

He has written a number of books, including Path Theke Pathe, Reporterer Diary, Sambad Napatthey and Kansoran Mukh. These books are mainly based on his experiences on the socio-economic condition of the rural masses.

Monajat travelled to the remote areas of rural Bangladesh since the late 1970s and front-paged rural scenes and many untold stories, popularising the rural journalism.

He was awarded Philips Award, Zohur Hossain Gold Medal, IDE (Institute of Diploma Engineers) Award and Ashoka Fellowship for his outstanding contribution in the field of rural journalism.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in separate condolence messages expressed their profound shock and deep sorrow at the death of Monajatuddin.

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina in her message of condolence expressed her deep shock at the death of Monajatuddin.

Meanwhile, the railway authorities have constituted a two-member committee to investigate how journalist Monajatuddin drowned in the river Teesta

The Nirmul committee in observance of its National Hatred Day yesterday brought out a procession in the city with an effigy of Jamaat Ameer Prof Golam Azam. The effigy was later burnt.

— Star photo