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Down to Earth

Beggary reaches new heights in city

By A S M Nurunnabi

Lately we have been witnessing a growing presence of beggars in the city. This ubiquity overwhelms us. Their steady increasing numbers are in evidence on roads, pavements, shopping centres, railway stations, steamer ghats and bus stations. Even when you are on the move either in cars, autorickshaws or rickshaws, there is no escape from them as your vehicle comes to a stop at any intersection on traffic signals. Our socio-religious ethos inclines us to a charitable disposition. But our feeling of charity has its limits. When one encounters a beggar at every step, the feeling of charity naturally evaporates. The whole thing then becomes a nuisance. This sometimes has a proportion that householders are compelled to lock up their entrance gates to prevent beggars entry. Some of these beggars are intelligent enough to use calling bells to make their presence felt. For a poor country, beggary is an inevitable issue, linked with wider socio-economic implications. From the present trend, it appears that the problem has reached a stage at which the daily life of the metropolis is being harassed to a severe degree. It has been observed that at times of religious festivals, a heavy influx of beggars into the city takes place from outside. Similar movement also takes place in the aftermath of major natural calamities. Besides, there is an endemic flow into city life of indigent people hit by landlessness, unemployment and social neglect. From the rising trend of beggary, it seems that most of those who thus migrate to the city choose to stay on in the city attracted by its embellishments and its offer of greater opportunities for easy earning by begging. In the city, there are reportedly some groups of beggars who operate in an organised manner. At the head of each group mostly consisting of cripples and those otherwise handicapped, there is a leader who reportedly directs operation in each area and at the end of the day appropriates a major portion of the collection from the group. These professional beggars are said to be common sights at important areas of the city. The beggars of the city in general are said to be choosy in accepting alms in monetary terms. Any offer of less than one taka is not normally acceptable to them. This is a sort of upward expectation of the city's beggars. An interesting aspect of begging is also reported near the Zia International Airport. They crowd round foreign travellers with pleas for help in terms of dollar. They are also seen to use stray words in English for begging from foreigners. We have not heard of any meaningful scheme formulated by the Department of Social Welfare for the control of beggary in urban areas. The problem is admittedly big and complex. There are reportedly seven vagrant homes in the country. They are located at Mirpur (Dhaka), Godnyle (Narayanganj), Betila (Manikganj), Dhala (Mymensingh), Konabari, (Kashipur) and Pubali (Gazipur). The total capacity of such vagrant homes is considered very small, in view of the magnitude of the beggar problem. More important in this respect is the need for undertaking suitable rehabilitation projects for the purpose of their poverty alleviation. There are various NGOs including Grameen Bank and BRAC with their projects which are said to be actively involved in this respect. But the various causative factors for beggary have so many ramifications that it is very difficult for a developing country like ours to meet the challenge satisfactorily in a feasible time frame. The resource constraints are obviously the limiting factor. This is perhaps why the increasing incidence of beggary cannot be controlled until such time when it is possible to improve the economic condition of the people. There is, however, one aspect of the problem which needs to be looked into by the authorities. There is no denying that there is an existence of a class of organised beggars in the city. Effective steps to deal with this ring may considerably help to reduce the presence of beggars in the city. In this connection, the Controller of Vagrancy, Department of Social Welfare said that, though the police sometimes conduct raids to pick up vagrants for their rehabilitation at the vagrant homes, such attempts do not usually yield fruitful results, because the beggars, in most cases, manage to escape from the vagrant homes on one plea or another. As a result, about 250 seats have reportedly remained vacant in the vagrant homes in spite of the best efforts of the concerned authorities. According to the authorities of the vagrant homes, beggars, by and large, are not willing to lose their freedom, whatever facilities are made available to them through their restricted stay at the vagrant homes. This is generally said to be the prevailing attitude of the city beggars. In an interview at his office on Thursday, the new British High Commissioner touched upon various issues ranging from parliamentary democracy to economic development in Bangladesh as well as bilateral relations. He said the inflow of foreign direct investment would increase if a long-term political stability is ensured in Bangladesh through consensus of all parties. In this context, the British envoy referred to a recent roundtable where politicians, professionals, bureaucrats and academics underlined political consensus on basic issues. Walker felt that problems in communication, energy, banking and public sectors are solvable provided there is a broad national consensus and clear-cut direction from politicians. Replying to a question about British assistance in strengthening the function of Bangladesh parliament, he said British Trade Arrangement (SAFTA) has been a landmark in this regional economic integration process. The countries have already announced a list of items which would be jointly considered for tariff concessions. This was a momentous beginning for a preferential trading arrangement which, if carried to its conclusion, would pave the way for the creation of SAFTA, he said. Shamsuddoha said considerable progress was made during the last year as there has been substantial expansion of concession and deepening of tariff cuts and removal of non-tariff barriers. He said that an inter-government expert group (IEG) on transition to SAFTA has already been decided upon which would start operating as soon as the second round of trade negotiations among the SAARC countries, now on in New Delhi, was concluded. Vice President SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bangladesh AKM Shamsuddoha said the focus should not be on what the size of the trade was or is, but on what it can be and should be for alleviation of the condition of the South Asian people. Vice President of the zonal committee of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik expressed the hope that this conference would achieve its goal for better and speedy trade arrangements. President-elect of Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Gaurav Swarup, in his welcome address said the recent ratification of South Asian Preferen-

SAARC businessmen call for breaking down tariff barriers

CALCUTTA, Dec 20: Business delegates from SAARC nations today pledged for accelerated economic cooperation among South Asian countries for speedy creation of the much-awaited South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), reports PTI. Participating in the regional SAARC economic conference here today, business delegates from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan called for breaking down tariff barriers among the SAARC nations to create a separate regional economic bloc. Inaugurating the meet, West Bengal Minister for Commerce and Industry Bidyut Ganguly said economic cooperation among the SAARC nations could not develop properly as it has developed in the case of South East Asian countries. "Our strengths and weaknesses are common and if we worked together our strength will increase which would be beneficial to the people of these countries." Vice President SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bangladesh AKM Shamsuddoha said the focus should not be on what the size of the trade was or is, but on what it can be and should be for alleviation of the condition of the South Asian people. Vice President of the zonal committee of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik expressed the hope that this conference would achieve its goal for better and speedy trade arrangements. President-elect of Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Gaurav Swarup, in his welcome address said the recent ratification of South Asian Preferen-

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Guardians anxiously waiting on the compound of Viquarunnissa Noon School in the city as their children appeared in the admission test for class one yesterday. — Star photo

3 bodies recovered from Meghna

NARAYANGANJ, Dec 20: Three bodies were recovered from the river Meghna here today, reports BSS. The bodies were sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for autopsy. The victims were identified as Shaheen, 9, Munir, 8, and their father Dulal, 38. They were learnt to have drowned in the river Meghna near Boyddighar Bazar ferryghat near Sonargaon thana on December 17 when launch ML Sharif collided with a country boat, police said.

Turkish C-in-C leaves Dhaka

The Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Armed Forces General Ismail Hakkı Karadayı left here yesterday after a four-day visit to Bangladesh, reports BSS. He was accompanied by Begum Seren Karadayı and a five-member Turkish military goodwill delegation, an ISPR press release said. Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Muhammad Mahbubur Rahman and Begum Nagina Mahbub, Chief of the Naval Staff Rear Admiral Mohammad Nurul Islam and Begum Saleha Islam, Chief of the Air Staff Air Vice-Marshal Jamal Uddin Ahmed and Begum, Tahura Jamal, senior military officers and their wives saw the distinguished guests off at the Zia International Airport. The Turkish Ambassador to Bangladesh Kemal Özcan Deavaj, Begum Deavaj and other embassy officers were also present at the airport to bid them farewell.

Gas purchase deal signed

From Page 1. Complete development of these wells by the last quarter of 1997 when it will be able to pump in 100 million cubic feet (mmcf) gas in the national grid. The Occidental has completed its gas field development plan and the land acquisition process is nearing completion, the sources said. The British company, Cairn, has already struck a gas reserve of over 1 trillion cft in the Sangu-1 well in the shallow waters of the Bay of Bengal. It has drilled and appraisal well and will drill two more wells in the Bay and two others in Chittagong by March next. The Cairn, the sources added, is scheduled to supply 160 mmcf gas per day to the Ashuganj-Bakhrabad Pipeline from the second quarter of '98. The British company has already spent 30 million US dollars and will invest 200 million dollars to set up a processing plant at Sangu-1, build platform and a 50 km pipeline to connect the gas field with the Bakhrabad system in Chittagong. The Cairn has assigned another company, Brown and Roots of USA, to complete 25 per cent of the work on its behalf. Chief of the Brown and Roots' parent company, Haliburton former US defense secretary Dick Cheney, who had earlier visited Bangladesh, is expected to visit Dhaka again within the next two weeks in this connection. "Both these companies took dynamic plans to develop these wells. If everything goes well according to the schedule and installation of Ashuganj-Bakhrabad (AB) Gas Pipeline in Chittagong region is completed by April next, we are hopeful that the existing gas supply problems will be solved," an official of the Energy Ministry said. The Chittagong region is currently faced with a severe shortage in gas supplies due to depletion of gas in the

Dhaka seeks

From Page 1. minister for his active role in the process of signing of the historic treaty to share water of the river Ganges. A problem, pending for last 20 years, has been resolved fairly with the signing of the agreement, he said, adding that it would expand friendship and cooperation of the two countries and help resolve the other problems. Jyoti Basu told the commerce minister that India considers Bangladesh very important as a neighbour and both the countries would get fruits in economic and political fields if the atmosphere of friendship and cooperation prevails. Later, the West Bengal industries and commerce minister called on the Bangladesh minister. A delegation of the Calcutta-based Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and Industries also called on Tofael Ahmed. He discussed various aspects of the prevailing environment of investment and liberalised trade policy in Bangladesh.

Rebels kill 7 policemen in Tripura

AGARTALA, Dec 20: Seven policemen including a sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) were killed today on the spot in an ambush by suspected Ultras of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) in Maracherra area under Manu police station in Dhalai district, reports PTI. According to preliminary information from police control room here, the militants ambushed a police vehicle at around noon when it was on its way to Karacherra on receiving information about abduction of some passengers of a private bus.

Political stability needed for investments: UK envoy

British High Commissioner in Dhaka David C Walker has said political commitment, stability and national consensus could attract more foreign investments in Bangladesh. "Bangladesh is a country with enormous economic potentials, but there are certain infrastructural difficulties which will have to be overcome to maximise those potentials," he told UNB. In an interview at his office on Thursday, the new British High Commissioner touched upon various issues ranging from parliamentary democracy to economic development in Bangladesh as well as bilateral relations. He said the inflow of foreign direct investment would increase if a long-term political stability is ensured in Bangladesh through consensus of all parties. In this context, the British envoy referred to a recent roundtable where politicians, professionals, bureaucrats and academics underlined political consensus on basic issues. Walker felt that problems in communication, energy, banking and public sectors are solvable provided there is a broad national consensus and clear-cut direction from politicians. Replying to a question about British assistance in strengthening the function of Bangladesh parliament, he said British Trade Arrangement (SAFTA) has been a landmark in this regional economic integration process. The countries have already announced a list of items which would be jointly considered for tariff concessions. This was a momentous beginning for a preferential trading arrangement which, if carried to its conclusion, would pave the way for the creation of SAFTA, he said. Shamsuddoha said considerable progress was made during the last year as there has been substantial expansion of concession and deepening of tariff cuts and removal of non-tariff barriers. He said that an inter-government expert group (IEG) on transition to SAFTA has already been decided upon which would start operating as soon as the second round of trade negotiations among the SAARC countries, now on in New Delhi, was concluded. Vice President SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bangladesh AKM Shamsuddoha said the focus should not be on what the size of the trade was or is, but on what it can be and should be for alleviation of the condition of the South Asian people. Vice President of the zonal committee of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik expressed the hope that this conference would achieve its goal for better and speedy trade arrangements. President-elect of Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Gaurav Swarup, in his welcome address said the recent ratification of South Asian Preferen-

Revolt at Dhaka Central Jail

From Page 1. But the security forces, using batons and rifle butts, overpowered the prisoners and took control quickly. The prisoners, with plates and mugs, fled to their barracks. Prison sources said some public display of beatings and cries effectively deterred the potential trouble makers. Earlier, the prisons nook and corner were searched as a precautionary measure. Some sharpened rods, lathis and other assortments, secreted from workshops and kitchens were recovered. The search since Wednesday had stocked the sentiment of some prisoners who were reportedly roughed up during the search. Some match boxes were also recovered from the prisoners. During the trouble, the prisoners at the Dhaka Central Jail missed their lunch. Some of them shouted to newsmen in the afternoon from their locked cells, indicating that they were not given food. Authorities later said food was served in the evening. The jail remained under a tight security ring thrown by BDR and riot police on the outer perimeter of the high walled red-brick prison, inside, police took up positions at every block to deter further trouble. Prison officials said 10 to 12 of their personnel were injured during the trouble. They were treated at the prison hospital. But they declined to give details of prisoners who were injured. High prison and police officials were interrogating some prisoners, reportedly masterminds of the trouble. A case has been filed in this connection with Lalbagh police station, prison officials said. Our Staff Correspondent Mizan Ali last night reported from Jessore that the situation at the Jessore Central Jail remained tense although morale of the mutineers was wobbling after a face-to-face negotiations with the authorities through prison windows yesterday afternoon. The authorities earlier restored electricity and water connections as demanded by the rebel prisoners before agreeing to talk. But they remained firm on their ten-point demand, prodded by some hardened convicts serving 30 to 105 years of hard labour. They are reportedly demanding remission of their sentences through reintroduction of the presidential ordinance promulgated in 1991 during the tenure of the then caretaker government. Officials sounded optimistic about the peaceful resolution of the conflict but declined to comment on a possible assault to crush the rebellion. They used loudspeakers to broadcast taped religious sermons in a bid to soften the prisoners' minds and drown their slogans which drew worried relatives and curious on-lookers. But no information was available to them excepting an assurance by the deputy commissioner that everything would be alright. Authorities declined to comment on the reported death of a Tanzanian out of seven foreigners and two children out of three, due to suffocation and lack of power, claimed by the prisoners. Officials said, they checked the rumours and during negotiations with the prisoners, the Tanzanians were summoned and all three of them were seen in good health. Our Tangail Correspondent said the 37-hour jail revolt ended at around 9:30 pm yesterday as the prisoners surrendered. Abdul Kader Siddiky, MP, along with additional divisional commissioner, Dhaka and an Additional ICP, DC, SP and other district officials persuaded the prisoners to end their barricade for talks. Kader Siddiky told the prisoners that he would take up their demands with the government and urged them to return to their barracks. Finally, the prisoners returned to their cells and freed the three prison wardens and an hospital orderly. A female warden who remained among the female prisoners also came out of the prison.

Court orders arrest of Phoolan Devi

NEW DELHI, Dec 20: An Indian court has ordered the arrest of former "bandit queen" Phoolan Devi on 55 cases of murder and robbery, news reports said today, says AFP. A high court in the northern city of Allahabad Thursday dismissed a petition from the Uttar Pradesh state government, which asked for permission not to prosecute the newly-elected member of parliament. Allahabad High Court Justice GSN Tripathi said: "She should now be arrested as the period of parole granted by the apex court has now come to an end with the present judgement." The Supreme Court had ruled that Devi could remain on parole unless a competent court ordered her to be taken into police custody. Devi, who was elected this year from the constituency of Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh, spent 11 years without trial following the alleged killing in 1981 of 22 men accused of gang-raping her.

Trial of 6 foreigners

From Page 1. of India reported. If convicted, they could face life imprisonment or even death. Peter Blitz and the five Latvians have been in jail since their arrest awaiting the trial to commence. Earlier this month, India's Home Minister, Indrajit Gupta told parliament that police were still trying to track down some more people involved in the arms drop. Requests for help have been sent to Interpol and other police agencies around the world, he said but did not give detail of the people or the nationalities. Investigation into the arms drop has unraveled a complex web involving foreign pilots and nations, according to the Indian government. The council endorsed the recommendations of the first meeting of SAARC commerce minister for the approval by the ninth SAARC summit and a greed that such meetings of the commerce ministers should be held on an annual basis.



Nepal National Students Union of a revolutionary communist faction burning pornographic magazines at Ratna Park in Kathmandu yesterday while demonstrating against an increase in pornography and sex crimes. — AFP/UNB photo

Anti-Indian protest in Kathmandu

KATHMANDU, Dec 20: Nearly 5,000 people turned out here today for an anti-India demonstration organised by communist factions, police sources said, reports AFP. The demonstration was organized by the National Revolutionary Front (NRF) and the National Democratic Front (NDF) led by prominent communist Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai. The protesters, chanting slogans which accused India of invading "a docile land" delivered a protest note to staff at the Indian embassy, a police source said. The note demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Indian army unit from Nepalese territory, and the cancellation of an Indo-Nepalese river treaty which was recently endorsed by the parliament. The communist movement accused India of encroaching on Nepalese territory along several parts of their border. The demonstrators chanted slogans against the Nepalese government saying that signing the Mahakali River Treaty with India goes against Nepalese national interest. At a public rally communist leaders, including the founder leader of the NDF Chitra Bahadur KC, and former parliamentarian Amik Serchan denounced the Nepalese government saying it was an Indian stooge.

DSE index falls by 104 pts

From Page 1. Last week trading took place only for four days — an upward trend dominated the market in the first two days while a bearish trend returned in the last two days. Trading was closed on Sunday and Monday on the occasion of Silver Jubilee of Victory. The DSE All Share Price Index decreased by 69.41 points falling to 2587.25 points last week's from the previous week's 2656.66 points. The market capitalisation of the bourse fell by Tk 495.70 crore to Tk 18478.45 crore from 18974.15 crore in the previous week. The Chittagong Stock Exchange's All Security Price Index also registered a fall by 79.06 points last week and closed at 1230.94 points on Thursday. Market capitalisation of the CSE decreased by Tk 887.05 crore falling to Tk 14443.33 crore from the previous week's Tk 15330.38 crore. The gap between gainers and losers, however narrowed down on the DSE floor and trading in volume and value increased last week compared to that in the previous week. On an average, 31 companies' shares gained daily while 50 incurred losses, out of 97 traded issues. Market operators and brokers said that the downward trend prevailed in the market due to the year-ending and be-

Bangabandhu

From Page 1. try, "Great Liberation War and Bangladesh," and "Bangabandhu and Bangladesh." Noted artist Hashem Khan also spoke on the occasion. Later, the wife of martyred freedom fighter Baduzzaman distributed prizes among the winners.

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