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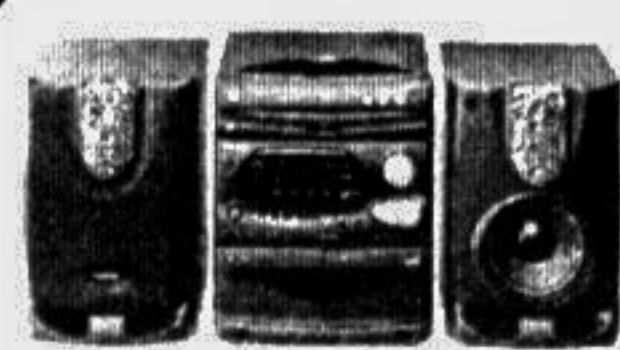
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Down to Earth

City's Shrinking Open Spaces

By A S M Nurunnabi

City's open spaces are shrinking frighteningly. Dhaka city once prided on its large open spaces, particularly in the Ramna area. In summer when its numerous *krishnachura* trees were in bloom, the entire area was filled with a riot of colour, as if on fire. With most of these trees gone now — victims of urban development — the vacant landscape excites nostalgic memories in old-timers. In winter also, the verdant area used to acquire a singular appeal as a mild nip in the air merged with bright sunshine.

The old part of the city was also not without its open spaces previously. Though they were few in number, they seemed to meet the needs of that time, considering the low density of population in the past. Now most of the city's open spaces in old areas are either no longer available or have become haunts of anti-social elements.

In planning for a modern city, provisions are made for the recreational facilities or at least for large open spaces for its citizens. For the Dhaka city, such provisions may exist on paper, but such facilities are sadly lacking in reality.

In the context of our social ethos, the needs of the majority of the city's inhabitants are simple. They consist in some open spaces or parks for taking a breath of fresh air or for children to play and have fun. Now in the frenzy for rapid urban growth, these simple basic amenities are being eliminated or forgotten.

We need hardly emphasise that in the burgeoning growth of city life, the modern concept of civic space has assumed supreme importance. It conveys the existence of a place where city dwellers of all strata, irrespective of class, religion or age meet to socialise themselves with one another. Philosophically expressed, civic space may also be the places where we can feel the earth beneath our feet and when earth yields beneath our feet, it gives us a unique feeling of pleasure which pavement never does. Such open spaces conceive the value and emotion of our urban people. They reflect

the image and quality of our people, enhance social interaction and consolidate our cultural and traditional homogeneity.

Unlike many European and American cities, there are in the city some designated civic spaces. They are mainly the Ramna Park, the Suhrawardy Udyan, Osmani Udyan and the Sangsad Bhavan Plaza. These civic spaces, however, suffer from certain ills which detract from their attraction. We may look at the case of Ramna Park, for instance. This once truly beautiful tract of sylvan shadows and the home of tall green trees is slowly but surely heading towards an uncertain future in order to make room for a swelling population and on account of the apparent caprice of myopic town planners. Hotel, tennis complex, mosque — all have chipped away from its spatial existence. Furthermore, the authorities are reportedly thinking of snatching more space from the park to accommodate new constructions. This trend of mindless expansion of the metropolis at the cost of the Ramna Park is very much galling.

Apart from the unregulated movement of anti-social elements within the periphery of these open spaces, some undesirable developments are also noted in these areas. In Suhrawardy Udyan, some portions have been taken away by some young men for their impromptu cricket playing which drives other visitors away from their operational area. It has also been observed that some areas of the Udyan are occupied on holidays by groups of students, both boys and girls, who sit in wide circles and practice their reciting skills. Tutorial sessions are also seen in operation on academic subjects in some other parts of the Udyan. Even a few years ago, profusion of seasonal flowers used to be seen on a good number of flower beds in all these Udyans. Now these are all conspicuous by their absence.

Of course, there is no denying that varieties of human events and activities have contributed to the evolution of

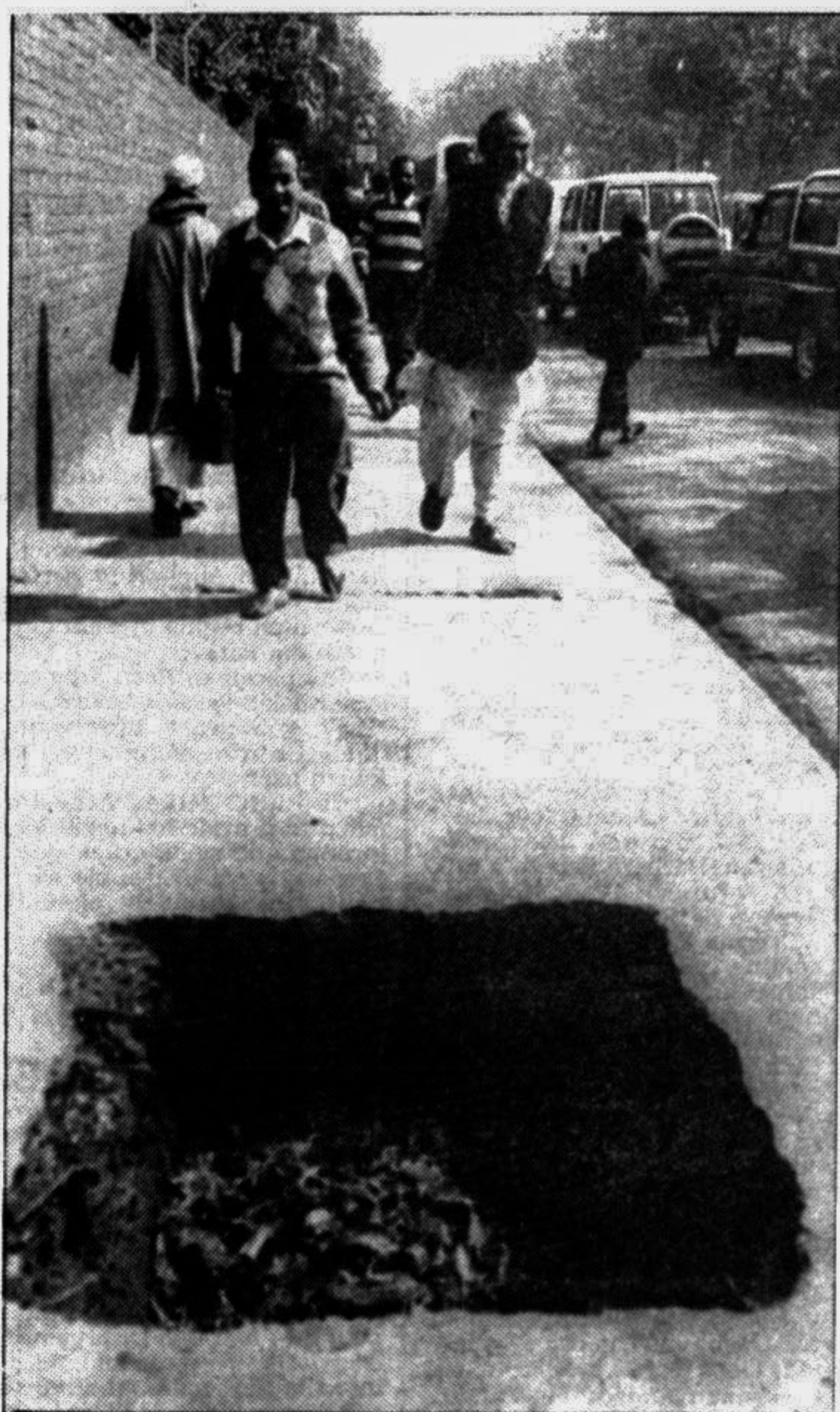
some successful civic spaces. For example, we may cite the New Baily road which some people call "Natak Sarani". Holding of varieties of urban functions over the years has transformed this stretch of road into a notable civic space. A number of fast food shops, sari shops, book shops and a couple of drama theatres act as multi-dimensional points of attraction.

There is another type of spontaneous civic space which has come up around national or historical events. For example, we may mention Shahid Minar premises, Bangla Academy Book Fair, the cultural functions at the Shahid Minar and also at the TSC. As spontaneous civic spaces, they add new dimensions to our urban culture and social life.

The same symbolism stands for Sangsad Bhavan Plaza and Crescent Lake premises. The tranquillity of water in the lake, surrounding greenery and verdure, all together attract people.

A deplorable aspect of these open spaces is that very often the important element of security is found wanting in their environment. This situation undermines the popularity of such places. Another important point is that there are tremendous possibilities for improvement and development of the existing open spaces and water areas like Crescent Lake, Ramna Lake, Gulshan Lake and Dhanmondi Lake which may, to a large extent, compensate for the growing shrinkage of city's open spaces by enhancing their attractiveness.

In this context, it is also felt that in the interest of city dwellers, the prime need is to ensure the adoption of appropriate measures to keep the existing open spaces free from encroachments of any kind and also to remain vigilant that the atmosphere there is not vitiated in any manner. The town planners may also give thought as to how, in view of the steady expansion of the city population, further projects may be taken up to broaden the scope of creation of more facilities for healthy activities in open space within the periphery of the city.



A big hole on the pavement outside the Secretariat building. — Star photo

5 more killed in Kashmir violence

JAMMU, Jan 23: An army officer was among five people killed during a fierce clash between separatist rebels and the military in a mountainous area in the northern state of Jammu-Kashmir today, a military spokesman said, reports AP.

The four others killed during the fight were identified as rebels belonging to the Harkat ul-Ansar group, one of the dozen separatist militias operating in the area.

The fighting broke out when Indian troops tried to storm a hideout of the armed group in Keshwan town, 280 kilometers (175 miles) northeast of Jammu, and met with fierce resistance, the spokesman said. Jammu is the winter capital of the Himalayan state.

Sunni protester

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demonstrators and then fled before police could move in. A member of the paramilitary Frontier Corps was among the injured.

While no one has taken responsibility for the shooting, Hangu has a large Shi'ite population and militant members of the two sects have clashed in the past.

The authorities, however, have refused to lay blame and so far no arrests have been made.

Animosity between militant members of the two sects has police and government officials on alert in Islamic Pakistan which is observing the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when devout Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset.

Nobody is happy under AL rule, says Khaleda

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday called upon the people to be prepared to launch a greater movement to prevent the implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts agreement, reports UNB.

The government wants to split the country through signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Agreement. "We cannot allow to split the country by implementing this agreement," she said addressing a pre-lit meeting at Shiddeshwary High School playground yesterday afternoon.

Begum Zia said Bangladesh will be fragmented into pieces if the agreement is implemented as similar demands would be raised from various parts of the country.

Reiterating her call to launch greater movement after the Eid-ul-Fitr, the Leader of the Opposition said BNP cannot allow anybody to give up the country's one-tenth of territory to the terrorists.

She said the country has to be protected from this 'terrorist' government as the country is not safe under the hands of the present regime.

Criticising the various provisions of CHT peace agreement Begum Zia said "It is the duty of all of us to protect the soil and the people of the country," this accord is a outcome of deep-rooted conspiracy against the country and its people."

Referring to the Ganges Water-sharing Treaty with India,

BNP chief said by signing the treaty the government has sacrificed the national interests as "we did not get the due share of water."

"Nobody is happy under the rule of present government. After taking power, this government could not render any remarkable service for people's welfare."

Begum Zia criticised the government for the dismal state of country's economy, trade and business, deterioration of law and order situation and price hike of essentials.

She said local industries are on the verge of ruin following unhindered entrance of cheap and inferior quality of Indian goods in the country. The entire production system of the country has been affected by the loadshedding and smuggling, the BNP Chairperson said.

Begum Zia alleged that the government had thrown the farmers into a deep crisis by increasing the prices of fertiliser, fuel and other agricultural inputs.

Organised by Ramna and Tejgaon thana BNP, the meeting was presided over by Maj (ret'd) Abdul Mannan. Among others, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Barrister Modud Ahmed, Begum Sarwari Rahman, Sadek Hossain Khoka, Mirza Abbas, Goyeshwar Chandra Roy and a large number of local party activists were present.

Indian cloths worth Tk 30 lakh seized

JHENIDAH, Jan 23: Police seized contraband Indian cloths worth about Tk 30 lakh from a Dhaka-bound truck and arrested its driver here today, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip-off, police stopped the truck coming from frontier Benapole at Hat-gopalpur in Sadar thana and found Indian saris and clothes in it.

One held with Indian motor cycle parts

SIRAJGANJ, Jan 23: Police arrested one person with Indian motor cycle parts worth about Tk 1 lakh at Sirajganj ghat this morning, reports UNB.

The arrested person was identified as Nirod, 30, of Modhupur thana in Tangail district.



Palestinian boys in Damascus taking part in a protest to mark Jerusalem Day yesterday. The day was declared in 1981 by Iran's late spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini who said Muslims should observe the last Friday of Ramadan to protest Israel's capture of Arab East Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East War. — AP/UNB photo

Americans can stomach affair, not a lie

WASHINGTON, Jan 23: As details of an alleged White House affair dribbled out, many Americans were giving President Bill Clinton the benefit of the doubt but warned that there is only so much they can stomach, reports AP.

"I believe his behaviour was entirely inappropriate and stupid, if it's true," said Barbara Rhodie, 55, a film producer from Heathrow, Florida.

"If it's true," said Jacki Brune, 31, of Los Angeles, "I think he should be impeached."

The buzz in bars, the talk on TV and the chatter in cafes across the country Thursday turned to the topic of Monica Lewinsky, a 24-year-old former White House intern and employee. She is said to have told a friend in secretly taped conversations that she and the president had an affair. But she later signed an affidavit in the Paula Jones sexual harassment case denying the affair.

Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr is investigating whether Clinton or presidential confidant Vernon Jordan urged Lewinsky to lie. Clinton has

denied the affair and efforts to cover it up.

Polls immediately after the allegations became public suggested that a narrow majority of Americans were prepared to believe Clinton and Lewinsky had a sexual relationship. Still, most Americans said they didn't want Clinton out of office.

What has Americans most upset: The possibility that Clinton may have asked her to lie under oath. A quick ABC poll Wednesday night found that 53 per cent of those surveyed said Clinton should resign if he had had an affair and told the woman to lie about it.

"Telling her to lie, that's what crosses the line," said Jamie Phace, 22, of Portland, Oregon.

Julie Roe, shopping at the Kirkwood Mall in Bismarck, North Dakota, said he should be left alone to do his job, unless he lied under oath.

"Then he has to be impeached," Roe, 65, said. "He has to pay the consequences just like anybody else."

Others were offended by Lewinsky's age and allegations

that she had sex with Clinton in the White House.

"Her age bothers me. She was just 21, probably pretty naive," said Lynn Westerman.

Meanwhile the attorney for Lewinsky said today the former White House intern is a target of the Whitewater criminal investigation and prosecutors oppose any deal for immunity as they probe whether she had an affair with Clinton and lied about it.

Attorney William Ginsburg also complained his client had been questioned in a hotel room for hours by FBI agents and prosecutors without an attorney to represent her.

"She has been targeted. She is a target," he told the Associated Press. A target, according to the manual used by federal prosecutors, is someone likely to be indicted.

Ginsburg said he is seeking a deal to gain immunity from prosecution for his client in exchange for her testimony. But Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's investigators have rejected the idea.

"Their position is they are not going to give her immunity," he said.

Malaysia

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called South East Asian tiger economies including Malaysia. Labour and Manpower Minister M A Mannan told The Daily Star Thursday that, "it would be too premature" now to calculate the amount of loss Bangladesh may incur as the Malaysian government itself has not yet come to any conclusion regarding the fate of foreign workers.

He, however, said that the process has been started to repatriate 669 Bangladeshi workers languishing in different prisons in Malaysia. The Bangladesh mission in Kuala Lumpur has taken up the issue with authorities concerned there so that a fine of RM 8,000 (Ringgit) on each could be waived, the minister said.

Official sources here said that the report of a large-scale retrenchment of Bangladeshi workers in that country was "not correct".

The Star, a Malaysian daily, had reported on January 19 that between 40,000 and 60,000 illegal Bangladeshi workers who had been retrenched wanted to return home but they could not afford the repatriation costs.

"A locally based Bangladeshi migrant worker centre, the Sheikh Mujib Memorial Centre, urged the government to waive the RM 3,000 fine imposed so that they could return home," reported The Star, a copy of which was obtained by this correspondent yesterday.

Quoting the president of the centre, Gulam Haid, the Malaysian daily said, "Illegal workers were given false documents or fake permits by unscrupulous employers and agents during the amnesty given by the government last year."

Another dies

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portedly gone into hiding. None could confirm whether the action had any legal authorisation. Police said they were looking for the owners for interrogation but did not find them till last night.

A large number of small bottles of nail-polish with a brand name Cude were found piled up inside the affected factory yesterday.

Police handed over the eight bodies to their families yesterday five of whom were buried in Azimpur graveyard.

Ctg Mass Killing Day today

CHITTAGONG, Jan 23: The Chittagong Mass Killing Day will be observed here tomorrow, reports BSS.

On January 24, 1988, at least 24 people were killed in police firing at a public meeting which was scheduled to be addressed by the then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina at Laidighi Maidan.

To commemorate the day Awami League city North and South district chapters will jointly place wreaths at the monument at the court building tomorrow morning.

A meeting will also be held where Minister for Labour and Manpower M A Mannan, Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Engineer Mosharraf Hossain are expected to attend the meeting.

Besides, different student and professional organisations will also observe the day through various programmes.

Body of young man recovered

Police recovered the body of an unidentified youth, 25, from Adabar area in the city at about 8 pm yesterday, reports UNB.

The body was packed in a sack. Police suspected that the youth was strangled. Some injury marks were found in the throat of the victim.

The dead was wearing a jeans pant, black jacket and white keds.

BJP's ploy

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which appeared on his own party's internet Website which suggested that 'India had a Muslim problem' and that 'cultural cleansing' could offer a solution.

The BJP's main rivals in the polls are the once-dominant Congress Party and the outgoing United Front government, a loose coalition of more than a dozen parties.

Muslims have traditionally voted for Congress in India.

Jumatul Wida

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for the integrity of the Muslim ummah, success of the oppressed Muslims throughout the world and regain of the Al-Quds after the Jumma. Country's continued peace and prosperity were also sought in the prayers.

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PM offers fateha at Bangabandhu's mazar

TUNGIPARA, Jan 23: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina laid wreaths and offered *fateha* at the mazar of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman here today, reports UNB.

Hasina drove to her ancestral home at about 12.10 pm and offered *fateha* at the mazar of Bangabandhu seeking eternal peace of his departed soul.

Newly appointed whips Prof Khaleda Kanan and Mujibul Haq Mujib, Sheikh Helaluddin MP, Nur-e-Alam Chowdhury MP and Shajahan Khan MP accompanied the Prime Minister.

A *milad mahfil* was also held there after the Jumma prayers and *munajat* was offered for the peace, progress and prosperity of the country.

The Prime Minister will stay overnight here. She will distribute warm cloths among the destitute people tomorrow morning. She will return to the capital in the afternoon.

Indian EC's love for animals

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: India's Election Commission ventured into animal rights today, ordering its officials in the eastern state of Bihar to stop a top politician from using pigeons in his campaign ads, reports AP.

Chief Election Commissioner M S Gill's orders followed complaints by animal rights activists about Rashtriya Janata Dal ads featuring photographs of pigeons with lanterns around their necks.

Rashtriya Janata Dal spokesman, Shakeel Ahmed Khan welcomed the Election Commission's directive, saying an activist put up the posters at his own expense without the approval of the party. He said the party would ask the activist to remove the offending posters.

However, Khan said pigeons are traditionally seen as symbols of peace and he did not think it amounted to cruelty to the birds.

The Election Commission, charged with ensuring voting and campaigning is free and fair, has broad powers. Commission officials said today they wanted to phase out the use of any animals in political advertising, because it could lead to mistreatment of animals.

The lantern is the symbol of Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal. Party symbols appear alongside names on ballots in India, where nearly half the adults are illiterate.

Yadav remains one of the most powerful politicians in Bihar, even after stepping down as the state's top elected official because he had been charged with stealing state funds. Yadav had his wife replace him as chief minister.

In the last election in 1996, the same activist trained parrots to call out slogans in support of Yadav, again without the party's consent.

Leopard

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also tried to block its departure for Dhaka when doctor of Mirpur Zoo rushed there to bring it back. This delayed its arrival at the zoo.

Finally, it was brought to Dhaka by Sylhet Thursday night by a veterinarian of the zoo Dr Shahiduzzaman and his assistants.

"We have taken care of it as much as possible. It has no bad internal injuries, the leopard is likely to survive," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The leopard shook off its tranquilliser-induced slumber yesterday morning, raising hopes among the zoo keepers that chances of his survival are fair.

Leopard is a protected animal as a species is on the verge of extinction. It was not immediately known whether any one had been taken into custody for illegally trapping and torturing the animal.

6 Merchant banks

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AAA Consultants and Financial Adviser, Pengia Partners Bangladesh Ltd, Paramount Securities Ltd and Capital Market Services Ltd.

SEC Executive Director AFM Assaduzzaman said that these merchant banks and the issue managers must go into operation within 90 days.

The SEC, regulatory body of the country's capital market, had earlier issued letters of intent to 19 applicants for merchant banks in two phases — in May and August last year.

Fourteen of them were interested to perform all the three functions of a merchant bank — issue management, underwriting and portfolio management. The rest were only seeking issue managers' licences.

Later, some other applications were filed. These were sent to the PMO, which took about five months until releasing the files on Sunday last.