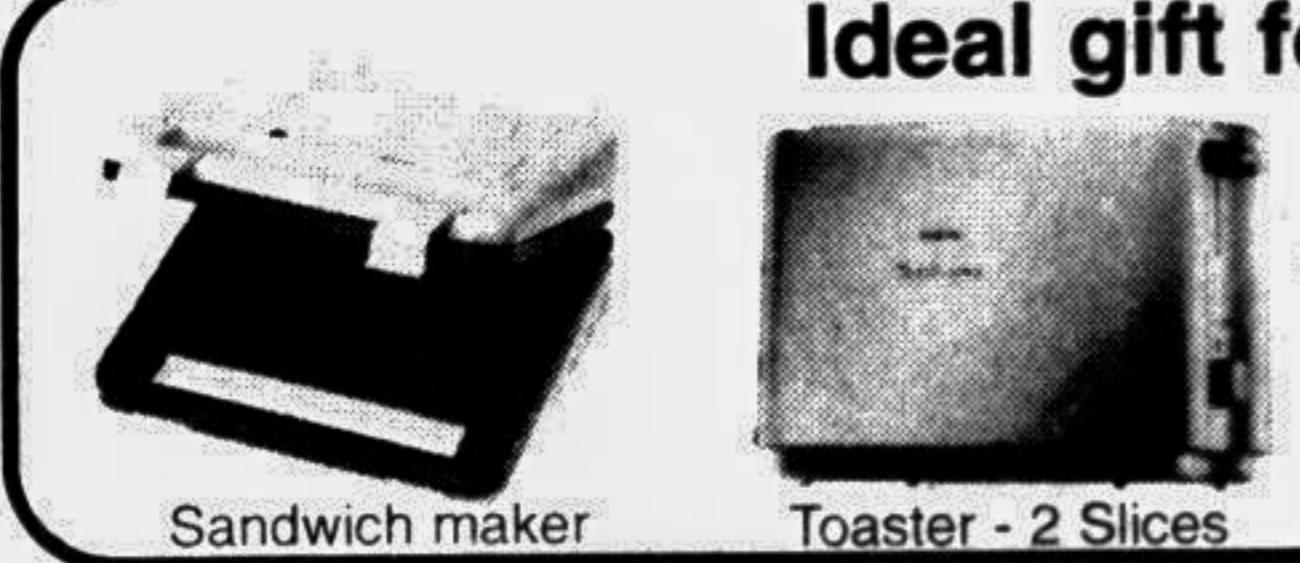
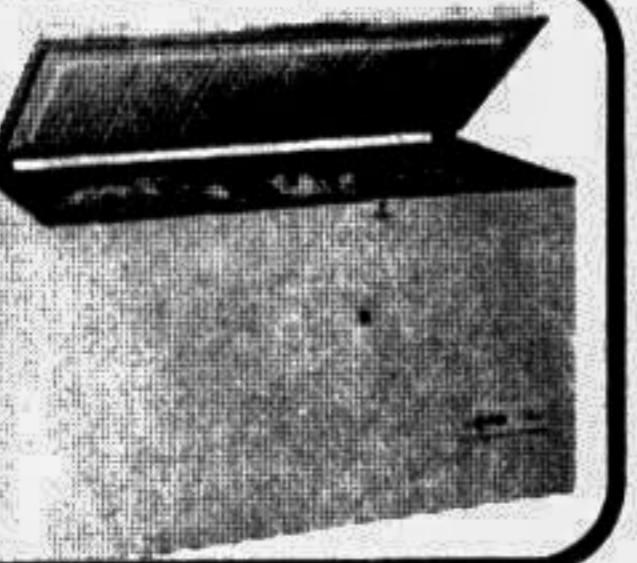


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Down to Earth

Encroachment on Open Public Spaces

By ASM Nurunnabi

A tendency towards encroachment on open public spaces in the city has always posed a threat to the public amenities, that have kept such facilities shrinking mainly due to growing pressure of population, abetted in most cases by the avaricious proclivities of the evil elements of society. Sometimes such a tendency gets a boost from the apparent indifference of the authorities controlling such facilities.

Among the more important public open spaces which came under such threat before and even now, are Osmany Uddyan, Ramna Park and Suhrawardy Uddyan. The latest incident of attempted encroachment relates to Osmany Uddyan. It is a patent fact that land grabbing by influential quarters in the city has remained a perennial problem.

The problem is compounded all the more when such public open spaces are owned by government or any public agency. Feeling that such ownership in most cases leave the owning quarters less prompt in remedial action and often indifferent when any incident of encroachment occurs, the potential land-grabbers don't hesitate to go to any length to satisfy their land hunger.

So far as Osmany Uddyan is concerned, an encroachment attempt was made in January 1996, which was luckily repelled. It was lately reported that a similar attempt was under way to establish the encroachers' occupation on nearly three acres of land of the said garden. The encroachers made their intent clear, without any trace of ambiguity: they would construct a multi-storey shopping centre there, which they claim, would enhance the city's scenic beauty as well as create employment for a good number of people.

This is a very strange logic, inasmuch as such attempt at il-

legal occupation of land which does not belong to them is sought to be boldly presented with temerity as a noble cause for the benefit of society, besides the flagrant claim of enhancing the architectural beautification of the area.

The public sentiment is naturally wounded by such high-handed attempt at usurpation of people's right, because at stake is the attempted effacement of a symbol of national heritage which is more valuable than a mere shopping centre. Such brazen-faced spoliation of environment and cultural heritage needs to be resisted with a strong hand.

Similar encroachment has reportedly taken place in Suhrawardy Uddyan in the form of a free-for-all public bathing place in one pond of the garden. Such a spectacle is galling to the sense of decency. A part of the garden has been converted into a field for shooting practice with toy rifles and balloons for the young and the kids.

A part of the garden is often used as a turf for cricket practice by groups of young men. The many plots of flower beds which used to fill the environment with beauty in winter have disappeared long ago; in their place we notice frequent movement of anti-social elements all over the place, creating an atmosphere of insecurity and keeping away on that score many intending visitors, particularly children.

The Ramma Park is not similarly free from encroachment of one sort or another. A chunk of land of the park has already been taken away by a non-political body situated near Kakrail. Attempts at recovery of the encroached portions of land seemed futile. The size of the park is getting reduced first on account of the establishment of a so-called Chinese restaurant on a part of the park and more

It is against public interest to accept the outrage perpetrated by quarters within the confines of the open public places which greatly detract their civic amenities.

Ramadan

Foodgrains at fair prices, assures PM

By Staff Correspondent
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said people will be provided with foodgrains at fair prices during the holy month of Ramadan.

Addressing a 'victory rally' organised by the ruling Awami League at the Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday, Sheikh Hasina also warned against hoarding of essentials and asked traders to refrain from raising prices of essentials.

The rally was organized to mark the Victory Day. After the rally, Sheikh Hasina, also president of Awami League, led a colourful 'victory procession' that marched through the city's main thoroughfares before being terminated at the Bangabandhu Bhavan.

The Prime Minister said vulnerable consumers will be entitled to five kilograms of rice and an equal quantity of wheat in a week at fair prices during the month of Ramadan. Besides, food distribution under VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding) programme will continue and we'll launch the OMS (open market sale of rice) programme soon, Hasina said.

Rice at fair prices will also be made available to employees of public and autonomous institutions through their respective cooperative networks, she said.

The AL president told the jubilant crowd that Victory Day celebrations had special significance this year in our national life as killers of the Father of the Nation have been tried. She listed various welfare programmes undertaken by her government for freedom fighters, the downtrodden and elder citizens.

The Prime Minister was critical of the main opposition party BNP for 'smelling rigging everywhere'. They (BNP) rigged all parliamentary by-elections during their time and now smells rigging in polls held in a free and fair manner in our time. A thief thinks others of his brand.

Sheikh Hasina said, They have to have confidence in democratic norms and culture.

The meeting over, a colourful procession was brought out which marched with the tune of musical instruments. AL's election symbol boat, replica of tanks and tiny tots posing as freedom fighters added color to the 'victory rally'.

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