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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 Osmani Uddyan, Ramna Park and Suhrawardy Uddyan. The latest incident of attempted encroachment relates to Osmani 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 Osmani Uddyan is concerned, an encroachment attempt was made in January 1996, which was luckily repulsed. It was later 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 illegal 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-faceted 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 Ramna 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 Bakrall. 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

## 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 Bhawan.

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 polls 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'.



President Shahabuddin Ahmed receiving Nobel laureate Amartya Sen at Bangabhaban yesterday. — PID photo

## We're proud of Sen's success: President

President Shahabuddin Ahmed has said Nobel-winning Bengali genius Amartya Sen devoted himself to research of a new kind of economics which is different from the traditional one, reports UNB.

Speaking at a reception accorded to Prof Sen by him at Bangabhaban yesterday afternoon, President Ahmed said he is an extra-ordinary meritorious.

Shahabuddin said Prof Sen's economics has become well-known world over as 'welfare economics' and the subjects of his research were hunger, poverty, famine and equitable distribution of wealth and social justice.

He said Prof Sen conducted extensive research on the cause, sufferings and dreadful effects of the famine that swayed Bengal in the Fifties.

The president noted with satisfaction that his research findings have been acknowledged by the world today. 'We are delighted at his great success,' he said.

Like great poet Rabindranath, Amartya Sen has close association with Bangladesh, he said. After partition in 1947, Sen became a citizen of India, but as Bangali he has natural affinity with this country, the President added.

Prof Sen identifies himself as an Indian, a Bangali and a Bangladeshi. 'We are proud of his wonderful success as a son of the country,' Shahabuddin added.

He recalled the early education of Amartya Sen in St Gregory School here and termed him as a 'son of Dhaka'.

President Shahabuddin mentioned that three other meritorious students of the Subcontinent were contemporary and friends of Amartya Sen when they were in Cambridge University. They are Rehman Sobhan of Bangladesh, Mahbub-ul Huq of Pakistan and former Indian Finance Minister Monomohon Singh.

In reply, Prof Amartya Sen thanked the President for the reception and said that he was overwhelmed with joy for the generous mind and friendly attitude of the people of Bangladesh.

The reception was also attended by Ministers, State Ministers, political leaders, Judges and former Judges, diplomats, Members of Parliament, Vice Chancellors, intellectuals, lawyers, journalists, scientists, writers, researchers and physicians.

## Sen: Freedom is key

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A balance is needed among the different ways human freedoms are enhanced," he said.

Throughout the lecture, Sen differed with the utilitarian view that the aggregate mental well-being of society is a good indicator of existence of justice. He said that such approaches neglected the existence of inequalities and deprivation of segments of the population.

Such inequalities and deprivation can lead to massive crises such as famines, unless corrected through protective nets and good information flow ensured by political opportunities.

He cited the examples of the famines in Bengal in 1943, in Bangladesh in 1974, and in China in the 1950s to illustrate the point that these could have been averted or minimised if protective nets and political freedoms were in operation.

"Uncertainty of purchasing power of rural wage-labourers caused the famine of 1943 when three million died, but in Bangladesh 1974, there were relatively few deaths compared to the size of the famine because quick protective action was taken to save the people," said Sen, who is considered a world authority on the economy and politics of famines.

In China, major gaps in information flow played a key part in turning a massive food shortage into a famine that claimed nearly 30 million lives. He pointed out that, in the absence of opposition parties, and a free press, the government was able to suppress information regarding the crop shortfall. This had led all provincial authorities to regard their own shortages as localised affairs, which were promptly kept secret from the government. The result was that no corrective action was taken until it was too late.

Sen returned to his original theme of a partnership role for the state and markets when illustrating how to ensure that famines do not claim many lives. He said it would be a mistake to expect either the state or the market to deal with famines effectively on its own.

The state, Sen said, knows little about marketing and transporting of food, and the market would respond only to effective demand, that is demand backed by real purchasing power. A coalition, including emergency intervention by the state, would be needed.

The state can create income in famine-hit areas through emergency employment creation. The people can then create the demand for food. The private sector can then move the food to meet the demand," Sen said.

It would be wise to keep the market opportunities going and have a protective net, rather than create a lack of confidence," he said.

Sen conceded that he could not find a single country where all five opportunities were in existence simultaneously, but suggested that a balance would have to be struck among the different ways to arrive at a rational social choice.

The lecture was organised by the Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies and the Grameen Bank. Chairman of CPD Prof Rehman Sobhan presided over the lecture, while BEA president Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud delivered the vote of thanks.

The key question Sen addressed was, among the different ways social decisions can be made, which one has the greatest claim to justice and equity? He cited five factors, which could ensure making of a rational social choice.

He suggested that political freedom or opportunity would play a key role in ensuring that governments are forced to address people's needs. Since policy-making is a political exercise, existence of opposition and freedoms of expression, thought, speech and of the press would play vital corrective roles.

"There is a need for constant correction through public criticism, but this is most needed when things in other areas go wrong," Sen said.

The second factor listed by Sen was market opportunity, which meant people's ability to freely engage in enterprise, access credit etc. But he warned against any dogmatic reliance on the market as the allocator of resources. "What is wrong with pro-market dogma is that it presumes nothing else is needed," he observed.

The third was procedural opportunity, by which he meant existence of business ethics and absence of corruption. "Business ethics demand that you can trust people, that you will not be deceived, and things will happen the way they are supposed to," Sen said.

The fourth was social opportunity, with the state as the key player, providing such goods as education, health, land reform etc. Without the existence of social opportunity, Sen said, market reforms and freedoms would not create wide opportunities.

Finally, he suggested that there should be a protective freedom, that is freedom to be protected from disasters and shocks, both natural and man-made, economic and social. He pointed out that in every society a segment of the population would fall behind due to various reasons, and they would have to be protected.

Sen said the need to have a protective net applied to institutional crises as well, such as the ones sweeping countries like Thailand, South Korea and Indonesia. But he warned against any retraction from the path of market reforms as a response to the crises.

## BNP won't rule out

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that forced her to go for shut down.

"Basically, we do not believe in the politics of hartal, and we have enforced only 12 hartals in last two and half years," she said, adding that BNP won't go for hartal unless compelled to do so.

She said during BNP's five-year rule, opposition Awami League had called hartal for 173 days.

Khaleda wanted to know from Sheikh Hasina whether her (Hasina's) party's hartal had damaged the economy in the past.

The BNP chairperson, however, said if the government agrees to call mid-term polls, then she would decide about the hartal issue after discussing with other political parties.

About Hasina's no 'hartal call', Khaleda said she (Hasina) can not be taken into confidence as she never kept any of her promises and not even the pledges she made during the election campaign to the people.

She justified BNP's demand for holding upzila and other local body elections under caretaker government. She said there could not be any free and fair elections under this government.

She reiterated her allegation about the rigging in Pabna-2 by-elections by the ruling party and the administration. She accused the Chief Election Commissioner of helping the government to rig the polls.

The opposition leader said future polls under the present

## Citizenship

From Page 1

ship and passport, the Nobel Prize winner said: "I am overwhelmed by the honour... I am happy to return to Bangladesh."

Prime Minister Hasina presented some gifts to Professor Sen. The gifts included an album containing photographs of the eventful life of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Later, the Prime Minister hosted a lunch in honour of the Harvard Professor.

Present, among others, on the occasion were former Chief Adviser Justice Habibur Rahman, Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, Finance Minister SAMS Kibria, Prime Minister's Parliamentary Affairs Adviser Suranjit Sengupta, Awami League leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Abdul Jalil, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, eminent citizens Prof Rehman Sobhan, Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Gazul Haq and Sheikh Rehana.

It may be mentioned that The Daily Star in an editorial yesterday had urged the government to confer honorary citizenship on Dr Sen.

## PM's directive

From Page 1

ishments keeping floods, cyclone and other sorts of natural calamities in mind. Three types of design should be made for flood-prone, cyclone-prone and normal areas.

She also suggested the officials to continue austerity and make their highest contribution to make up the losses inflicted by the devastating floods, which engulfed about two-thirds of the country last monsoon.

Hasina announced that ration to the poor on VGF cards would continue during Ramadan and asked the officials to monitor proper distribution of food through this and other welfare programmes.

She directed the officials to monitor the disbursement of agricultural-credits, post-flood agriculture rehabilitation and distribution of all other government assistance to the real affected people.

Referring to the Asrayan project, the prime minister said the government wants to give home to every homeless and would build another 2000 baracks-like houses to accommodate more 20,000 families.

She asked the DCs to find out the khas lands and make list of the landless to provide them with homes through Asrayan projects.

She also asked them to take steps for literacy programme and make their respective district literacy-free, like Lalmonirhat, Chuadanga and Magura.

Referring to the election of women to Union Parishad in direct voting, Hasina directed the deputy commissioners to make sure the female members perform their duties without any problems and exercise their rights to work for the people.

Responding to the same demand of the DCs, the prime minister said the government would give computer to every DC office for smooth and easy flow of information and try to build a communications network that will speed up the total operations.



A citizens' rally at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday condemned the attacks on NGO workers at Brahmanbaria on December 7. — Star photo

## BNP's public meeting in city today

**By Staff Correspondent**

The Seven Party Alliance will hold separate public meetings in different parts of the city this afternoon.

Main opposition BNP will hold a public meeting at Paltan Maidan at 3 pm today. BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in parliament Khaleda Zia will address the meeting as chief guest. Top BNP leaders will also addressed it, said a press release.

Today's programme has been announced to protest 'massive rigging and terrorism' allegedly by the ruling party in Pabna-2 by-election, 'failure' of Election Commission to ensure fair voting, price hike of essentials as well as gas and power services, deterioration of law and order, and demand resignations of the government and Chief Election Commissioner in mid-term national election and for bringing prices of essentials within the purchasing power of commonmen before the Holy Ramadan.

**Young man beaten to death**

**From Our Correspondent**

JHENIDAH, Dec 18: A young man was beaten to death in the town last night.

The victim was identified as Rinku, 25.

Police said, some unidentified young man picked up Rinku from a shop at KP Basu Road in the town at about 8.30 pm and beat him up mercilessly.

## 'Punish people behind B'baria incident'

**By Staff Correspondent**

Speakers at a citizens' rally in the city yesterday demanded punishment to those who carried out attacks on people coming to attend a rally to celebrate the 27th Victory Day at Brahmanbaria on December 7.

Held at the Central Shaheed Minar with Prof Kabir Chowdhury in the chair, the rally put forward 14-point charter of demands and proposals. A large number of people joined the rally and raised their voice against the fundamentalist and reactionary groups.

In a resolution, it said so-called imams of two or three local mosques and teachers and students of some madrassah along with terrorists attacked the people who had joined the Victory Day celebration programme and demanded exemplary punishment to those responsible for the heinous attack on innocent people.

The resolution strongly condemned the role of Deputy Commissioner of Brahmanbaria and said the DC's role was 'very arrogant, provocative and anti-liberation'. It said the DC in collaboration with some anti-liberation elements all on a sudden cancelled the permission which was taken earlier for holding a five-day rally.

It expressed deep anguish that the district administration was yet to take any effective step or file cases against the attackers, who also damaged public and private property worth several crores of taka. The resolution sought immediate intervention of the Prime Minister in this regard.

It said that the affected people and organisations went to local police station for filing a case, but police are yet to accept the cases. However, police recorded the cases filed by the anti-liberation and terrorist elements. It demanded immediate withdrawal of all false cases filed by the attackers and trial of the attackers under subversive acts.

The resolution also demanded cancellation of government approval and grants to those madrassahs involved in the attack and urged the authorities concerned to identify the fake madrassahs which are misappropriating huge amount of public money.

The meeting urged the government to introduce unified curriculum and education system in all educational institutions, including the madrassahs. It also demanded ban on the politics based on religion as per the 1972 Constitutional provision.

The resolution welcomed the government initiative to probe into the incident through a judicial inquiry commission and demanded inclusion of a female representative in the commission.

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## Third day of strike

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He said the leaflets were designed to 'arouse the people' but gave no further details.

The largely Shi'ite Muslim south rebelled against Saddam following the 1991 Gulf War, but the uprising was suppressed by Iraqi forces.

Saudi armored units briefly moved close to the Iraqi border Thursday, apparently on a surveillance mission, the Iraqi official said. He spoke on customary condition of anonymity.

The aerial attack in the early hours of today set off the loudest explosions heard so far since the United States launched the operation early Thursday, firing 450-kilogram Tomahawk cruise missiles from warships in the Gulf.

On Thursday night and early Friday, B-52 heavy bombers joined the blitz, firing 900 kilogram cruise missiles. British Tornado jets also participated in the operation, named 'Desert Fox'.

One missile appeared to have hit in the vicinity of the state Military Industrial Corporation, and smoke could be seen drifting up from the area. The corporation is in charge of Iraq's factories.

The Pentagon said more than 200 missiles hit 50 sensitive sites in the first attack, including Saddam's military intelligence headquarters in Baghdad and four barracks for special security guards who protect weapons sites.

An assessment of the damage from the second round of attack wasn't immediately available.

To protest the strikes, Iraq's ally Syria today recalled its ambassador to Britain for urgent consultations. The move came a day after the Russian ambassador to Washington was recalled.

Meanwhile, in a letter to Yeltsin Clinton has asked him not to let the two countries differences over Iraq air strikes harm bilateral relations.

"We should not let our negative effect on Iraq have a negative effect on our bilateral relationship," Lockhart quoted from Clinton's letter.

China criticized the United States today for the air strikes against Iraq, calling them a case of 'power politics' that set a dangerous precedent.

Washington circumvented the UN Security Council and ignored diplomatic norms when it acted alone in attacking Iraq, 'creating a dangerous and odious precedent that shakes the entire world,' the ruling Communist Party's leading newspaper, People's Daily, said in a commentary.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao added to China's official condemnation, expressing 'deep regret' over the United States and Britain's continued attacks. In a statement carried by the official Xinhua News Agency, Zhu renewed Beijing's demand for an immediate halt to the military action.

## BIMSTEC

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which began here on Thursday, ended yesterday setting the agenda for the ministerial level meeting.

The BIMSTEC, a forum of five South Asian countries comprising Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand was formed to increase economic cooperation among the member countries.

The meeting will consider the proposal for membership of Nepal, which expressed its willingness to be a member of the forum. Another foreign ministry official said but gave no details.

A joint statement will be signed at the end of the ministerial meeting, officials said.

**3 foreign ships**

From Page 1

ernment to form a committee which continued investigation in this regard, port authorities apprised the deputy minister for ports of the deadlock in destroying the damaged foodgrains during his recent visit here.

Besides, the food cell also wrote earlier to the higher authorities to lift the ban in this regard, port sources said.