

Husain plans another experimental film

REUTERS, Mumbai

Undeterred by the flop of his first movie, one of India's best-known painters M.F. Husain is planning a second film and has almost finished the script.

The artist, whose energy belies his 85 years, said his new feature, "A Tale of Three Cities", will be "another experiment in film-making".

"My first film explored the beauty of the female form. This film will be on a young man facing the 21st century," Husain told Reuters yesterday. "The script is almost complete."

Husain, who had a humble start painting cinema hoardings in Mumbai, has exhibited in major art galleries around the world.

The artist, with his thatch of silver hair, has attracted controversy over the years, notably for run-ins with right-wing Hindus over nude portrayals of goddesses in his paintings and habit of walking barefoot sporting a cowboy hat.

Husain said his first feature film, "Gaja Gamiini" (Woman with the graceful gait of an elephant), which opened last December with popular Bollywood star Madhuri Dixit, was an artistic commentary on the plight of women through the ages.

The new film, to be shot in Hindi, will be directed by Husain and filmed in the southern city of Hyderabad, the historic fort-city of Jaisalmer in Rajasthan and the Czech capital Prague.

In Hindi, the title will be "Do Kadam Chal Ke Dekho" (Walk two steps and see). It will tell the tale of three families in the three cities

with the young man playing the pivotal role.

Husain is unfazed by the box office failure of his first film. "Indian film-goers are corrupted by trash films but I don't blame them. They will take time to understand my films," he said.

Bombay-based Bollywood, India's answer to Hollywood, reels out a film almost every second day, mostly action and romance cocktails liberally spiced with song-and-dance routines.

"I don't make films to make money," said the artist, whose paintings nearly always have horses in them.

"I'm trying to demolish the hold of the box office on Indian cinema. It is not the criteria for a good film. It's a monster," he said, swishing a long wooden paintbrush.

Husain's new film will have music by one of India's most popular music composers, A.R. Rahman, who is also collaborating with British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber on a new musical.

The painter said he wants to cast "great actors" from India's film industry. He said versatile south Indian actor Girish Karnad and noted Bombay theatre actress Nadira Babbar have already agreed to star.

The prolific painter said he would first paint each scene of the film and then translate it into celluloid.

The artist said he wants to spread his passion for films. "This is the message of my film-making so that young people are attracted to this dynamic medium."



President Shahabuddin Ahmed addressing the conference of Good Language Activists Council at the National Museum Auditorium yesterday.

Bush affirms support for N Ireland peace process

AFP, Washington

The administration of President George W. Bush on Thursday reaffirmed Washington's commitment to Northern Ireland's precarious peace process as human rights activists appealed to US officials to remain involved.

The announcement came after a lunch with Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern at the US Capitol in honor of St. Patrick's Day.

"The United States will continue to support full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and stands ready to assist the process in any way that the British and Irish governments and the parties deem useful," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

He said Bush nominated State Department policy planning director Richard Haass to coordinate US policy on Northern Ireland.

Outside the White House, Bush said his meeting with Ahern went well and he looked forward to another meeting Friday.

"We'll be discussing the Good Friday agreement, what I can do to help. Be reaffirming our trade with Ireland," the president said.

Later Thursday, US Secretary of

State Colin Powell met briefly with Gerry Adams, the president of Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Army's political wing, to discuss, among other things, an IRA statement announcing a resumption of talks with an international disarmament commission.

Powell expressed hope the re-engagement would progress "expeditiously," a State Department spokesman said.

David Trimble, the head of Northern Ireland's semi-autonomous government said Wednesday he awaited a report from the commission's head, Canadian General John de Chastelain, before commenting.

Human rights activists on Thursday appealed to Bush to remain involved in the process and blasted Britain for failing to establish a public inquiry into the killings of two human rights lawyers in Northern Ireland as well as enforcing police and judicial reform.

"It is vital therefore that the United States government gives clear and public support to the new human rights dispensation and to institutions ... tasked with implementing the human rights and equality agenda," said Martin O'Brien, of Belfast's Committee on the Administration of Justice, at a House subcommittee hearing.

Representative Henry Hyde, chairman of the House Committee on International Relations, emphasized Bush's support for the peace process. "He will need little prodding on that issue," Hyde wrote in a letter released Thursday.

But at the hearing, Mike Posner, executive director of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, voiced his concerns the administration might not lend the level of support necessary, as "concerns here about human rights are going to be diminishing."

During Bill Clinton's presidency, Irish politicians enjoyed unprecedented access to the White House and Clinton played a key role in brokering the April 1998 Good Friday peace accord.

Such close involvement is not likely to be repeated under Bush, though he promised after talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair last month that he was "standing by."

Chief Whip's son

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beating the drivers of some auto-rickshaws and tempos that also got stuck in the morning rush hour traffic. He also damaged some of the vehicles stranded in the traffic jam.

When contacted, Kotwali police said they heard about the incident but could not confirm the identity of the youth who damaged the vehicles and beat up drivers.

In an earlier incident, Chief Whip's another son Sadik Abdullah fired gunshots on the Pajero jeep of industrialist Nurul Haq Sikder on March 9. The issue was settled "forcibly" by the high-ups.

Jubo League

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cases for his alleged involvement in criminals activities, according to police.

But his family members said Munir was an accused only in a political case. He was organising secretary of Jubo League Ansar Camp unit in Mirpur.

DMP officials including Deputy Commissioner (West Zone) Sajjad Hossain and ADC (West Zone) Ibrahim Fatemy visited the place of occurrence.

A two-member inquiry committee headed by the ADC was formed yesterday to probe the incident.

Earlier on May 14, 1998, a young man named Mujibur Rahman Majija drowned in Bashabo Jheel when police chased him.

Another young man, Jewel, drowned in the box culvert in Motijheel area in a similar situation on November 15, 1999.

Besides, a young man named Tuku drowned in Mirbagh Jheel while trying to escape police chase. Local people alleged that he fell into the Jheel as police kicked him.

Another man, Oli, jumped into a pond and died as police chased him.

Police did not file any murder cases in connection with those incidents and filed "final report".

Mongla ports

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and some others by the Port Authority.

Dock Management Board filed the case after the workers refused to attend the delivery work of stevedoring organisation MH Chowdhury & Sons.

"There are 18 ships with imported goods waiting at the port for unloading the consignments," port sources said.

Director (traffic) of the port Mohsin Sarker said the BMSA and dock workers' leaders called the strike as the CPA turned down their "illogical demands."

UNB Khulina correspondent reports: Labourers at Mongla port stopped work since yesterday morning demanding more hands in cargo handling.

The labourers demanded appointment of 12 more labourers for every gang booked for unloading imports.

Strikes in both the seaports simultaneously created a serious crisis in the country's external trade, business circles said expressing concern.

Training on orchid, medicinal plants in Laxmipur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Training on orchid and medicinal plants was imparted among village women in Laxmipur recently under the aegis of Development of Biotechnology and Environmental Conservation Centre (DEBTEC), says a press release.

DEBTEC Executive Director Dr Ferdousi Begum and associates conducted separate training programmes on expansion of orchid through tissue culture and development of women entrepreneurship and preservation of medicinal plants through home gardening.

Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Golam Kibria distributed certificates among the women those participated in the training programmes run through March 6 to 11 at Dakkhin Maguri village in Laxmipur.

Annan

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self-determination referendum in Kashmir, but India has refused to allow a plebiscite, insisting that Kashmir is an integral part of its territory.

Annan's recent clarifications that the resolution could not be imposed on either country has been welcomed in India as a de facto endorsement of New Delhi's stance on Kashmir, which also rules out any third-party interference.

Jaswant Singh described Annan's calls for the resumption of an Indo-Pakistan dialogue on Kashmir as "very wise counsel" but refused to be drawn on when talks might begin.

"The time and the venue has to be decided by the dialoguers themselves. A conducive atmosphere has to be prepared first," Singh said.

Blasts kill 18 in China

AP, Shijiazhuang, China

Explosions at three workers' dormitories in a northern Chinese city killed at least 18 people Friday and reduced one building to rubble, state media and fire officials said.

The three blasts, spread over an hour and several kilometres apart, struck dormitories for two separate cotton mills and a railroad company in the city of Shijiazhuang, said the city fire official, who gave only his surname, Liu.

Liu said deaths and injuries were still being counted, but the official Xinhua News Agency said 18 people were killed. Shijiazhuang, an industrial center and the capital of Hebei province, is about 280 kilometres southwest of Beijing.

Police sealed off the explosion sites and patrolled areas nearby. Scores of police cars cruised the streets. Hundreds of officers stood in groups of three and four in rows across streets scrutinising passing vehicles.

Police tried to stop reporters from reaching Shijiazhuang. Cars were stopped at a toll gate off the highway

from Beijing and ordered to turn back. Two dozen taxis were idling at the gate late Friday while drivers were interrogated about their passengers.

The first blast nearly flattened a five-story dormitory that housed 48 families at the No. 3 Cotton Mill, Liu said. Firefighters rushed to the scene after receiving a call at 4:16 a.m. (02:16 BST).

"The building was almost completely collapsed," Liu said. Other firefighters said people were still trapped in the rubble Friday evening.

About 15 minutes later, a second explosion struck another five-story dormitory housing 15 families at the nearby No. 1 Cotton Mill, according to Liu.

The third explosion hit a dormitory, also five stories tall, where 15 families lived at a city-run railroad company. That blast was reported at 5:10 a.m., Liu said.

A city official said the death toll at the No. 3 Mill dormitory was rising, but he wouldn't give a figure.

Bangabandhu's birthday

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and at party offices across the country and at 5:30 a.m.

AL leaders will converge at the Bangabandhu Bhavan at 7 am and place wreaths at the portrait of the architect of the nation's independence.

After attending party programmes in the city, Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina will fly to her ancestral village home at Tungipara in Gopalganj district to offer feteah at the grave of Bangabandhu. She will also take part in a milad mahfil and a discussion meeting there.

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed in a message on the occasions said emergence of Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign country is a glorious chapter of history and Bangabandhu is the centrepiece of that chapter.

Bangabandhu suffered frequent imprisonment for his relentless struggle for people's interest. His genuine love for people was the source of his power, the President

added.

In her message, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged the people to build a "Sonar Bangla" through united efforts to turn the motherland into an abode of peace, prosperity and happiness for all including children.

She said the political sagacity and farsightedness of Bangabandhu has made him the Father of the Nation.

Bangla Academy, Shilpakala Academy, National Museum, Nazrul Institute, National Book Centre and Islamic Foundation will jointly organize a discussions on the life and works of Bangabandhu at Ramna Green in the city at 4 pm.

To mark the day, the Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote will bring out a rally from in front of the Matshya Bhavan at 11 am in the city.

The annual Bangabandhu Award on agriculture will be handed over to recipients at a function at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the evening. President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed is scheduled to hand over the awards.

Wahid sacks minister

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid has dismissed a minister from one of the parties involved in an attempt to oust him from power over a corruption scandal.

Forestry Minister Nurmahmudi Ismail, a member of the small Justice Party, was sacked on Thursday, Defence Minister Muhammad Mahfud told journalists at the presidential palace.

Mahfud said Wahid would officially announce the dismissal later Friday on his return to Jakarta from a trip to Lampung, South Sumatra.

The Justice Party (PK) is one of a group of Muslim parties that supported Wahid's election as president in October 1999 but later turned against him.

They are now seeking his ouster through a special session of the national assembly.

Ismail is the second minister

from the Muslim parties to be dismissed by Wahid this year. Laws and Regulations Minister Yusril Isha Mahendra, from the Stars and Crescent Party, was fired in February.

Mahfud cited three reasons for the sacking of Ismail.

"He does not share the same visions as the president, his forestry policies have been unclear and we do not know where the forestry sector is being taken to, and he has been unable to control the mass of the PK," he said.

He declined to give further details and Wahid would only say: "Wait until this evening."

Wahid has been under mounting pressure to step down and hand power to his deputy, Megawati Sukarnoputri, after being censured by parliament in February for his alleged involvement in two financial scandals.

UN has 'limited options' over Kashmir issue

AFP, New Delhi

Apart from calling on India and Pakistan to resume talks, the United Nations has "limited options" over the Kashmir issue, according to the spokesman for UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Spokesman Fred Eckhard said Annan, who arrived Thursday on the final leg of a South Asian tour, has no plans to meet Kashmiri separatist leaders.

Eckhard noted there was an "unhealthy obsession" and "hysterical" focus on Kashmir whenever a foreign visitor passed through New Delhi or Islamabad.

Earlier in the week, Abdul Gani Lone, leader of an umbrella group of Kashmir separatist outfits, had said he was "very optimistic" about a possible meeting with Annan.

But Eckhard said Annan had met no Kashmiri leader during the Pakistan leg of his tour.

"There was no meeting in Pakistan, why would he meet them here?" Eckhard said.

Asked whether the UN stand would not come as a great disappointment for the Kashmiris, Eckhard said: "India does not want us to get involved at all... there is nothing we can do," besides pressing New Delhi and Islamabad to

"resume dialogue."

Earlier, Annan told reporters after arriving in New Delhi: "The important thing is for the engagement to begin... this is the right time for India and Pakistan to resume a dialogue."

Talks were frozen nearly two years ago when Indian and Pakistani armies clashed briefly in the Kargil sector of Kashmir, sparking international concern over the state of ties between the nuclear neighbours.

India has refused to resume direct talks until Pakistan stops sponsoring "cross-border terrorism" -- a charge Islamabad denies.

New Delhi controls two-thirds of Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in the Indian union. Islamabad controls the rest of the Himalayan state, the cause of two of the three wars in the sub-continent partitioned in 1947.

A Muslim separatist rebellion on the Indian side has claimed more than 34,000 lives since 1989.

"It's a bloody mess," Eckhard said, adding that Annan was aware of the Kashmiri people's "suffering" but that he thought it prudent to utter "not the K word" in India, a major UN member.

The United Nations wants to know whether India, which has maintained a unilateral ceasefire in

Kashmir since November, is "serious" about pursuing a political solution while an eventual resumption of dialogue was "in the air," Eckhard said.

During his stay in New Delhi, Annan was to meet President K.R. Narayanan, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh.

However, Annan was carrying no message from Pakistani leaders, Eckhard said.

Besides the Kashmir issue, Annan's talks with Indian leaders were expected to touch on developmental issues, UN reforms and peacekeeping, security and good governance.

Annan's three-day visit is the last leg of a tour that has taken him to Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Major parties

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was in second position in 30 constituencies.

IOJ

Islami Oikya Jote won only one seat in the 1996 polls. Of its 165 candidates, 162 lost deposit. In the 1991 election, the party fielded 59 candidates but none of them was elected. It lost deposit in 54 seats.

Hijacked

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or escaped in Madina before it was stormed.

The rescue raid followed tough negotiations. Shortly before the storming, hijackers were shown on television talking with a Saudi negotiator on the steps of the plane, parked in a remote part of the airport runway.

At the point, there were ambulances and fire trucks but no sign of security forces in the vicinity of the airliner. A group of armoured vehicles and troops was stationed about a kilometre away.

A Russian diplomat said however Saudi forces had ringed the plane for a while during the night to prevent it from taking off after negotiations ran into difficulties.

A red, green and white striped Chechen flag had draped the open door of the Tupolev 154, operated by Vnukovo Airlines.

A Saudi airport official said the hijackers had been demanding enough fuel to fly 5,000 km. He did not say where they wanted to go. Officials said Saudi negotiators had demanded the release of all hostages.

The Pentagon is currently weighing a Taiwanese request for advanced weapons, including Aegis destroyers and PAC-3 defenses against short-range missiles.

US sat detects new Chinese missile base opposite Taiwan

AFP, Washington

A US spy satellite has detected a newly completed Chinese missile base on mainland China opposite Taiwan, the Washington Times reported Thursday.

The Pentagon declined to comment on the report, citing restrictions on discussing intelligence matters.

"But I don't think it's any secret that China is modernizing its military, and that includes increasing the size of its missile force," said Rear Admiral Craig Quigley, a senior Pentagon spokesman.

He noted that China's military modernization was "an element of our thinking" as the Pentagon considers Taiwan's defense needs under the Taiwan Relations Act.

The Pentagon is currently weighing a Taiwanese request for advanced weapons, including Aegis destroyers and PAC-3 defenses against short-range missiles.

A Pentagon official, speaking on

condition of the anonymity, said the gist of the Times report was accurate but would not comment on specifics because it involved classified intelligence matters.

The newspaper said the missile base, detected in the past two weeks, is located several miles (kilometers) northeast of Xianyou and was about 135 miles from Taiwan.

It said about 100 CSS-7 short range ballistic missiles and mobile launchers were deployed there, and that it was the second CSS-7 missile base within range of Taiwan.

The first CSS-7 base was completed last year near Yongbin, the Times said.

A third missile bases is located further north at Leping, a regional headquarters for all missile forces, the Times said. Some 100 CSS-6 missiles are deployed at that base, the report said.

Gandhi Peace Prize

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ished apartheid in the world," President K R Narayanan said after conferring the Gandhi Peace on them.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke on the occasion.

Vice-president Krishna Kant, former president R. Venkat Raman, former prime minister I K Gujral, ministers, heads of diplomatic missions including Bangladesh High Commissioner Mustafa Faruque Mohammad, and a select distinguished guests were present at the function.

The Gandhi Peace Prize-2000 is being awarded to one such institution which has been helping the marginalised masses to reject charity and to master their own destiny instead," the citation said on Grameen Bank.

On Dr Mandela, the citation said, "he is a shining symbol of non-violent resistance to the anti-human practice of apartheid, suppression of democracy and denial of social justice in the true Gandhian spirit of

fighting tyranny and discrimination."

President Narayanan said though Mahatma Gandhi was born in India he was made in South Africa.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in his brief speech recalled Dr Mandela's struggle against racism and oppression and said "we recognise the indomitable spirit with which you and your comrades fought against overwhelming odds in your quest for freedom, equality and the establishment of a democratic South Africa."

Lauding the success of Grameen Bank, Vajpayee said it had proved that developmental banking at the grassroots was not simply a fine academic principle, but that it could also be put into practice.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Nelson Mandela praised India's democracy and said South Africa was learning a lot from India. He said Mahatma Gandhi whom South Africa claimed as its own left a spiritual legacy.

Abductors free one?

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Security sources said the suspected hideout of the abductors is still cordoned by army so that the kidnappers cannot escape.

All vehicles have been ordered off the roads including the dirty trails in Kauhali-Lakkhichhari areas for precaution.

Local markets and shops are being monitored and help has been sought from traders in the area to locate the kidnappers, the source added.

They denied press reports that army troops are moving around tribal villages, burning forests to flush the kidnappers out and even torturing people to extract information.

"We are careful not to run combat patrol in case it jeopardises lives of the hostages" one security source said.

In a statement on March 15, Advocate Shaktiman Chakma, Legal Affairs Secretary of the PCJSS, said that he did not say America is involved in the kidnapping.

"International clique might be involved in the kidnapping but not America," he added.

Ershad's move

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Party (JPPP) would be held on March 19.

However, Khandakar Mahbub Hossain said Ershad did not ask party MPs to join parliament session. Rather, he asked them to have a meeting of the JPPP, Mahbub said.

Mahbub explained that Ershad wanted to ascertain which faction of JP (one led by him and other by Anwar Hossain Manju) enjoys support of majority of party MPs, as the Election Commission suspended allocation of traditional JP election symbol 'plough' to any one of the party factions.

He said he had explained to Ershad that joining parliament session was not necessary to prove majority party lawmakers' loyalty to him.

As per jail code, a visitor can meet a person under custody once in a fortnight. However, Kader met Ershad twice within three days. Jail sources said, they were "undone" as the government gave the permis-

sion.

Kader tried to get "instruction" from Ershad for JP MPs to join the next parliament session. As Kader could not convince Ershad, he asked JPPP Deputy Leader TIM Fazle Rabbi to meet Ershad.