

# Mass transit-- a solution to urban cholesterol

Q M MAHTAB-UZ-ZAMAN

**I**N Dhaka city, parks, streets and open spaces work as breathing space, where fresh air with less pollutant is supposed to be advantageous to our health. But these spaces fail to serve our purpose as the air pockets trap the pollutions mainly from car exhaust. Beside the pollutions, traffic congestion makes it much worst as the running engines cause pollutants to get more intense.

Much has been done, thanks to the drastic measure by banning two-stroke baby taxis, the result of which is evident while traveling through the streets. Now we seldom see black smoke on the streets.

Streets and highways are like veins and arteries, and obviously, cars can be branded as fat bodies that make cholesterol high or low. Like high cholesterol is harmful for health, too many cars and the congestion can make a city harmful to our health. Traffic delay and congestion can also bring high social cost, which is the result of loss of time and

where mono-rail station would get the passengers to carry to other nodal points. Since, monorail would move on overhead rail, cars and buses can smoothly move around on major roads. Rickshaws, therefore, will not mix with buses, taxis on main roads. This means we should keep the rickshaws, which are environment friendly having zero emission as well as economically attractive as source of financial support for many a poor urban dweller.

**BOT:** A foreign investment mechanism: The question is how to realise this gigantic task. Bangladesh has been a good place for foreign investment and therefore, with the good track record, a joint venture project for mass transit development looks feasible. A commonly known BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) should be introduced in this project.

**BOT** is a popular scheme/system that exists all over the world, where the government gets the infrastructure running without paying initially, but can enjoy the benefits after the investor gets back the profit and hand over the



No to car

Another point is the security, which sounds feasible in case of mono-rail having a full chance of observation by security personnel. These matters need careful and thorough estimation and feasibility study.

**Bottomline:** The bottomline is that we need a city which would work harmoniously with the movement of people. This would bring an efficient system of infrastructure which every urban dwellers dream of. A better and efficient transportation system is not a luxury but an essential element of a city. We hope to work together by bringing all expertise existing in our country with an honest approach to a successful city; and it is not that far when our next generation would enjoy a sustainable and healthy city. We wait for that moment.

Dr. Q M Mahtab-uz-Zaman is Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, BRAC University



Yes to mass transit mono-rail

unproductive delay.

Social cost of traffic congestion: Multi-modal transportation system (rickshaw, bus, car, pedestrian, bicycle etc.) that exists on Dhaka's streets and highways creates a web of congestion and makes the daily commuting a hard and painful experience. The average time for journey to work or other destination is as high as the waiting time at the bus stand. Taxis, on other hand, become costly for low and middle-income bracket of commuters. Delay caused by traffic congestion can be equated or quantified as high social cost and waste of human resources.

Mass transit as a remedy: There are many proposals and attempts made by international organisations to introduce mass transit in Dhaka city, but, with no reason these are still considered by the government as utopian ideas.

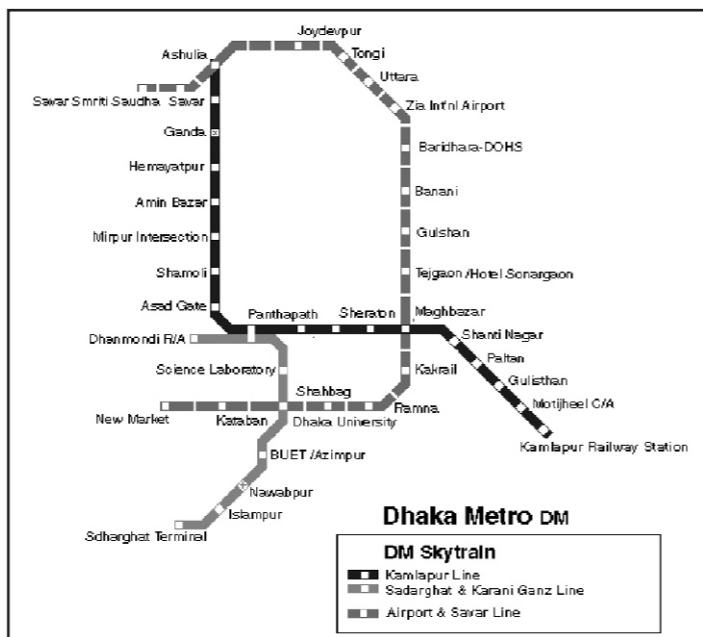
How the monorail should work with other modes of transportation? A hierarchy of modes, such as, rickshaw, bus, monorail should be allowed to use designated areas. Such as, rickshaws would serve in a neighborhood level and bring passengers to nodal points

project to the government or quasi-private companies.

**Financial feasibility:** According to our honourable minister of finance (quoted: 'Money is no problem!'), we see a clear horizon of assurance from the government. The joint-venture looks comparatively a feasible proposal. Maintenance and management by a group of trained people privately appointed (easy to control the quality and responsibility) is likely to be appropriate in this case.

**Energy to run mass transit:** Electricity-run mass transit system produces zero emission. Parallel development of electricity produced by gas may be a feasible proposition that the government should not ignore.

**Overhead mono-rail or underground rail?** It is a matter of feasibility study which should be done to identify the long-run cost and benefits. Initially, considering the physical structure and the maintenance/management of the city authority, it would be best to have an overhead mono-rail since a large amount of cost for ground work can be minimised. Maintenance would be much easier for overhead mono-rail.



A possible mass transit for Dhaka city and outskirts (Author's hypothetical proposal adopted and modified from Bangkok Mass Transit)

# The Holy Prophet's Night Journey through Seven Heavens

## Miraculous and unparalleled

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

**N**O Muslim can take courage in denying any saying (Hadith) of the holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) -- the greatest of all men and all times. Nor a Muslim can be so audacious as to deny any of the 6,666 Ayats (Verses) of the Holy Qur-an -- the greatest of all Holy Books. And it is in one of these 6,666 Quranic Ayats Merciful Allah says in clear and unambiguous terms about the miraculous Night Journey of the holy Prophet (pbuh) through the spheres of seven heavens that took place during the lunar month of Rajab so that He could show him some of His wonderful Signs. In Ayat one of Sura Bani Israel (or the Children of Israel) of the Holy Quran Almighty Allah says:

"Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose precincts We did bless, in order to show him some of Our Signs, for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things)."

So, dear readers, our dear holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) was carried in body from the Sacred Mosque in (Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (Baitul Muqaddis in Jerusalem) on a horse called "Al-Buraq" in the company of archangel Hazrat Jibrail (A) on 27th of the holy lunar month of Rajab. On reaching the Farthest Mosque he tethered his horse to a ring in the gate of mosque and entered into the mosque and while in this mosque (in Jerusalem) other Prophets (peace be upon them) offered prayer under the leadership of the holy Prophet Muhammad (SM). After the prayer angel Jibrail (A) took the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) to all the seven heavens one after another. After leaving the precincts of the Masjidul-Aqsa (Jerusalem) when Jibrail (A) took the holy Prophet (pbuh) to the first heaven on the same vehicle ("Al-Buraq") he asked the guardian angel to open the gate, and as soon as the gate was opened Hazrat Adam (A), the Progenitor of mankind appeared. The Messenger of Allah saluted Hazrat Adam (A) and he returned the salutation and expressed his faith in his Prophet-hood.

In this way the holy Prophet (pbuh) reached the sixth heaven and met Prophet Hazrat Musa (A) and similarly saluted him. Hazrat Musa (A) returned the salutation and expressed his faith in the Prophet-hood of Muhammad (peace be upon him). It may be specially mentioned here that when the Messenger of Allah was bidding him adieu he saw him (Hazrat Musa) weeping and when he was asked the reason of his weeping he said he was weeping because he witnessed he (the holy

Prophet) was able to lead greater number of his followers to Paradise than he did. The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) then left the sixth heaven and reached the seventh heaven with Jibrail (A) and met Prophet Hazrat Ibrahim (A) and here after exchange of greetings he (Hazrat Ibrahim) similarly expressed his faith in the Prophethood of Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh).

After leaving the seventh heaven, the holy Prophet's ascension continued and Jibrail (A) took him to "Sidrat-ul-Muntaha" (a wonderful Tree known as "Lot" tree), and here he was also shown "Al-Bait-al-Mamur" the much frequented house which is encompassed daily like the Holy Ka'ba (the Sacred Mosque in Mecca) by Almighty Allah's seventy thousand angels so that the angels

the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) again ascended to the Presence of Allah for reduction of number of prayer times. Benign Allah reduced the number from fifty to forty. The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) then descended, and when he again met Hazrat Musa (A), he again requested him to implore Allah Rahmanur Rahim for further reduction. Accordingly, the holy Prophet (pbuh) again supplicated Benign Allah to reduce the number further, and it may be stated here, the process continued till the number was ultimately reduced to five only, and when the number was ultimately reduced to five only, and when the number was communicated to Hazrat Musa (A), he again urged the Holy Prophet (pbuh) to go back to Almighty Allah for further reduction. But this time the holy Prophet (pbuh) politely declined to approach the

miraculous Ascension through the seven Spheres of Heavens there was nothing unusual for the true Muslims. They thought if Almighty Allah is powerful enough to have created the heavens and the earth by an act of His Will (cf. Ayat 58 of Sura Ya Sin of the Holy Quran) then He is surely Powerful enough to take His Friend the holy Prophet (pbuh) beyond the heavens and show some of His wonderful signs at first hand which are inaccessible to man otherwise. The disbelievers, however, went to Hazrat Abu Bagar Siddiqi because of this unusual event and he readily said: "Yes, I do verify it." And it was on this occasion the great companion of the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) earned the title as "Siddiq" meaning verifier of the truth.

It may be recalled here that when years before two American astronauts landed on the surface of the moon the people of the whole world were dumbfounded to hear this sensational news. The astronauts, while spacing on the surface of the moon, spoke to their President sitting in the White House over telephone and exchanged greetings with him. And before the two spacemen were fully prepared for their flight in the outerspace with their spaceships through medical check-up and years of exercise and training were essential and the persons responsible for imparting such long and arduous training were the world renowned NASA scientists. But was it at all necessary for our dear holy Prophet for any medical checkup or for receiving any exercise? It was not; for the Almighty Allah was Powerful enough to take him to His Divine Presence. He simply wished it.

**This is the holy lunar month of Rajab. The holy Prophet's Night Journey from the Holy Ka'ba (in Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (in Jerusalem), which is known as "Al Isra" and subsequently his miraculous ascension through seven spheres of Heavens ('Miraj'), took place on the 27th night of this month of Rajab.**

who once encompassed it would not have their turn again till the Resurrection.

After witnessing Sidrat-ul-Muntaha and "Al-Bait-al-Mamur" the Messenger of Allah was taken to the Divine Presence by a special vehicle called "Raf Raf" after passing through seventy thousand veils of Almighty Allah's Light ('Noor') and here he "experienced the thrill of witnessing the Divine Glory and Manifestation at the closest possible propinquity," according to an observation made by Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri (Islamic University Al-Madina Al-Munwara) in his world famous book "entitled Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum" (The Sealed Nectar). And while in the Divine Presence what Merciful Allah gave our holy Prophet (pbuh) as a gift to His dear Friend? It was "Salat" that is, five-time daily prayer for him and all his adult eligible followers. But as regards this five-time daily obligatory prayers it has a background which I would like to inform my dear readers about. It may be mentioned here that at first Rabul Alameen, Lord Creator, ordained 50 times daily prayer for the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) and all his followers and on his return when he spoke to Hazrat Musa (A) and informed him that his Creator enjoined 50 times of daily prayers for him and his followers. On hearing this Hazrat Musa (A) expressed his apprehension and said that the followers of the holy Prophet (pbuh) would not be able to offer prayers for so many times daily and that is why he requested him to go back to Almighty Allah for reduction of the total number of prayer times. Then

Lord Creator and said: "I feel ashamed of repeatedly asking my Lord for reduction. I accept and resign to His Will". Then the holy Prophet (pbuh) returned to this mundane world with the Gift of "Salat", that is, five times daily prayers for him and his followers.

"Salat" or five-time daily prayer is one of the 5 strong Pillars of the grand edifice of Islam. The Holy Quran says in clear and unambiguous terms: "Establish regular prayer, for prayer restrains from shameful and evil deeds; and Remembrance of Allah is the greatest thing in life." But unfortunately Muslims are oblivious of this duty which is obligatory on the part of every eligible Muslim.

One may ask whether the Messenger of Allah (peace by upon him) saw his creator with his physical eye or not. Some interpreters are of opinion that seeing Allah Rabul Alameen with naked eyes has not been confirmed. But Ibn Abbas has said "the word 'Ru Ya' as used in the Noble Quran signifies the observation with the help of the eye" (5-38) as clearly indicated in the aforesaid book entitled "Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum" (the sealed Nectar P.149).

As regards the holy Prophet's

This is the holy lunar month of Rajab. The holy Prophet's Night Journey from the Holy Ka'ba (in Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (in Jerusalem), which is known as "Al Isra" and subsequently his miraculous ascension through seven spheres of Heavens ('Miraj'), took place on the 27th night of this month of Rajab. As Muslims all over the world are celebrating this Night (Laila-tul-Miraj) with due solemnity and fervour, we in Bangladesh, should also take this opportunity and celebrate this sacred occasion in a befitting manner and supplicate before Merciful Allah for His Forgiveness and also for conferring His Gifts on us.

# The folly of building peace with might

SYED MAQSUJ JAMIL

**T**HE weak submits to the strong. Might is an advantage, in the natural order of things. Generally, it gets its way. The conquest is often carried to extremity, where righteousness is treated with ugly arrogance. It is therefore not without foundation that human spirit in its abject submission bemoans, might is right. However might in its extremity is self destructive, so might is always not right. In its extremity might is a state of perpetual combat, an unwholesome obsession with self-protection that sees threat everywhere. Peace, the foremost precondition for might to translate it into lasting reward finds it an inhospitable place. Unless tempered by accommodation, recourse to might becomes a dispiriting cycle. Turbulence that marks the recourse to might banishes peace. In today's world we countenance many examples of the folly of building peace with might. Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon's brutalities against the Palestinians are a poignant example of this folly.

Palestinian problem and the dilemma of Iraq are the trouble spots where might is stumbling in building peace. Both the places are witnessing the exertion and the desperation of the mightiest country of the world. Israel by virtue of its patronage by United States represents a force to reckon with in the Middle East. America's much publicised 'Road Map' for peace in the region has been immobilised by remorseless use of force by Ariel Sharon's stubbornly hostile policies. His deep-seated disdain for the Palestinians offers little hope for accommodation. He considers might an important tool in cowering down the Palestinians to accept peace on his terms. The brutal reprisals he conducts with vengeance shows us a mind driven by might. Sharon is ill equipped for peace. It makes him a troublesome partner for

America in its pursuit of peace in the region.

The urgency and the importance of peace in the region are far greater for America now. She has estranged Arab friends who need to be assured and conciliated. Road Map is an effort to repair the damage. It is understood that Israel enjoys leverage with United States because of the large Jewish community. To be fair, America cannot be piously in its dealing with Israel and the Arabs. The tilt will always be there. It does not however encumber

against the Arabs of Palestine in the thirties never left him. For him, the Arabs of Egypt were distant neighbour. It, in a way, freed him to pursue his dogged policy of building Jewish settlements in West Bank and Golan Heights. Peace with Egypt did not bring respite for Israel from PLO attacks.

Begin lost on peace because he stubbornly stuck to the folly of building peace with might. Sharon is his mentor's man. The Irgun activist in him holds him back from relenting on

the most harmless will find life dishonourable and join the suicide bombers. More children will become orphans, more women will become widows, and the tragedy will not see any end. Many innocent Israeli lives will fall victim to suicide bombing. It is a pity that the prospect for the people of Israel to discover the many rewards of peace and the assurance in peaceable contact with their Arab neighbours of the region is receding. They have the wrong leader for the right time. Sharon's intransigence is typical of a

are joining the ranks of suicide bombers. Yasser Arafat since his return to pacifist intention has been useful as a moderating influence between the ever-doubting firebrands of the religious groups. He is under siege and of late under threat of expulsion or extinction. His role as the popular leader has been vilified. Abbas has already resigned. In such a volatile situation, where the leader of the other side is using his might with such nonchalance, Hamas will be radicalised beyond redemption. This is what

leadership lies in making Israel to understand that force may prolong their control over the occupied territories, but only peace offers them a frontier without fence that stretches far and wide into the Arab world. It is still a wonder to the world how much of security will make Israel to trust her Arab neighbours. For Israel to trust her neighbours, she has to belong to the Middle East. When trust works, force becomes an antiquated tool.

Syed Maqsoj Jamil is General Manager, Summit

**The success of the Palestinian leadership lies in making Israel to understand that force may prolong their control over the occupied territories, but only peace offers them a frontier without fence that stretches far and wide into the Arab world...For Israel to trust her neighbours, she has to belong to the Middle East. When trust works, force becomes an antiquated tool.**

America from being a peace broker. There is a scope and ground for it because most of the powerful countries in the Arab world are allied with the United States. America has a genuine stake here.

Sharon's bulldozing style does not pay attention to all these considerations. It has doomed America's success in finding a sensible peace partner in Mahmud Abbas. In him the peace process had a good prospect. He offered a refreshing departure from the 'hardliners', so bitterly despised by Israel. Abbas very much looked a man to make peace with. The Aqaba meet conveyed progress and hope with Abbas looking at ease with Bush and Sharon. Although Sadat and Begin succeeded in making a historic peace, they never looked a jolly good company. Begin was always stiff and glacial. It was the boldness of Sadat and the goodness of Carter that enabled peace to happen. Menahem was the cut out Irgun leader all through. The distrust and despise with which he conducted the terrorist organisation

brutal retaliations against the Palestinian Arabs. He is hardened to the core in his distrust and despise. These regard concessions and accommodation as threat. Peace talk can go on, but he will not stop in his course. Rather he is vigorously pursuing his policy of making it a costly peace for the Palestinians. Israel's might is coming down heavily on them. Routine air strike is hunting down the Hamas men in Gaza strip. Living quarters in Nablus, Hebron, Ramallah and other West Bank cities are bulldozed into rubble. West Bank is being fenced in with high tech electrical barbed wires, and in the process nearly 10 per cent of its territory is falling to Israel. Removing squatters is touted as dismantling of settlements.

Sharon wants a peace on his terms, a peace built with might. The folly of his stubborn course will only prolong misery in the region. Gaza strip will be in perpetual turmoil, more distraught Palestinians will through the funeral processions, protest in West Bank cities will be brutally put down, even

leader that sticks to the folly of building peace with might. He followed the same course to failure in the past. The occupation of Beirut and the formation of a Christian enclave in the southern Lebanon were spearheaded by Ariel Sharon. It succeeded in driving out the PLO from Beirut, but wresting the domination of Lebanon from Hizbullah, Amal and the Druzes could never be achieved. The world still remembers his complicity in Christian militia rampage of Chabra and Shatila camps that killed 750 Palestinians. Israel maintained a military presence in southern Lebanon for a long time. Sharon's vaunted might could not end militant resistance. Instead Israeli casualties kept rising. It resulted in Israel's meek withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

There are other fields too where Sharon's obsession with force has placed Israel in a situation with little room to manoeuvre. Oslo accord has defaulted badly on time frame to render it ineffective. Even Israeli Arabs have been driven to desperation and

Sharon's might has done to peace. The peace he wants for Israel is for the Palestinians to submit to an order built on the might of Israel. He has jeopardised the prospect of peace built by the boldness of Sadat, the sincerity of Rabin and the moderation of Arafat.

There never was a time when hopes of a peace have been dashed with such arrogance. Americans have their hands full in Iraq. The Presidential election is just a year away. Peace may have to wait for another person, another day. Presently, gloom is descending on Palestine. Is there no way of looking at Palestine dispassionately? Yes, there is a lot to grieve over the Palestinians. They have been driven out of their land, dispossessed of their country for no fault of theirs. Someone else's crime became their bane. It is a painful fact that arms cannot bring back their land. A place in the Middle East recognised by international community and accepted by Israel can restore Palestinians to honour and eminence.

The success of the Palestinian