

DUTP WB criticised for 'excessive interference'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The fifth meeting of Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) yesterday criticised the World Bank (WB) for what it said was its 'excessive interference' in Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP).

The bank was particularly blasted for 'unilaterally' withdrawing a Tk 200 crore chunk of its loan, intended to be used for constructing a flyover from Gulistan to Jatrabari under the Tk 900 crore DUTP, as the board failed to come up with a suitable proposal for the job in time.

"We would have definitely proposed some alternative proposals if they had given us some time," said DTCB Executive Director Quamrul Islam Siddiqui.

"It is the government that should have the full authority in the WB-financed projects, as it has to pay back the loan. We should not entertain World Bank's role as the project controller," he added.

Secretary of the communications ministry Syed Reazul Hayat echoed the same sentiment at the meeting, held at Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) office, with Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka in the chair.

The Jatrabari-Gulistan flyover is now being constructed by a private company on a build-own-operate-transfer basis.

The meeting also criticised the poor selection of sites and faulty construction of nine overhead footbridges, built in the city under the DUTP. "No physical and social planning was done before starting with the construction of the overhead footbridges," Siddiqui observed.

The meeting was informed that the construction of Mohakhali flyover that began on December 6, 1999 was lagging behind in schedule but would be complete by June 30, 2004.

"We will be able to complete all the components of the DUTP by June next year, when its first phase ends," Mayor Khoka hoped. He instructed the DUTP project directors to work with conceptual understanding and complete the work within the timeframe.

The mayor also announced that two more inter-district bus terminals would be constructed at Keraniganj and Tongi to further

smoothen the traffic movement to and from the city.

The DTCB in that meeting decided in principle to demolish the roundabouts near Hotel Sonargaon and at Shahbagh, Matsya Bhaban and Gulshan Section 1 and Section 2 to ease the traffic snarls. The Saarc Fountain at Hotel Sonargaon roundabout will be relocated to the adjacent park.

Among others, representatives of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, the WB, Roads and Highways Department, Local Government and Rural Development Department, Local Government Engineering Department and Dhaka Metropolitan Police attended the session.

Abandoned boy finds home at orphanage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The four-year-old physically and mentally challenged boy, found abandoned at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) on December 18, was moved to an orphanage at Uttara Sector-9 yesterday.

Families for Children, a private orphanage funded mostly by Canadian individuals, received the still unidentified boy at 12:30pm.

The boy, weighing 12kg and wearing T-shirt, shorts and slippers, was left at the door of gynaecology ward No. 15 of the DMCH and no-one claimed him till date.

Social welfare department's DMCH unit agreed to arrange a shelter for the boy who is unable to move his hands and legs.

Shikha Biswas, an assistant project manager of the orphanage, received the child who also lacks mental growth and does not respond to any call or sign.

"He will be kept at our special care section for disabled children," Shikha said.

"His condition suggests he needs physiotherapy and we have special trainers for it," she said adding that their city home in Uttara and vacation camp in Narayanganj have been nursing 11 such children.

NCBs to collect land taxes from Jan 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) will collect land taxes of six upazilas under as many divisions from January 1.

Under an experimental scheme, landowners in Sylhet Sadar Upazila, Hathazari in Chittagong, Shibpur in Narsingdi, Barisal Sadar upazila, Satkhira Sadar Upazila and Paba in Rajshahi will pay their land-related taxes to four NCBs -- Sonali, Janata, Agrani and Rupali -- instead of Tahsil office, official sources said.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman will inaugurate the new tax collection system at Sylhet Sadar Upazila on January 1 while Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Land Minister M Shamsul Islam will jointly open the scheme at Shibpur upazila on January 2.

The government has taken up a massive plan to develop the land management system in a bid to simplify land laws and solve decades-old land-related problems, Shamsul told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The new initiative to collect land taxes through the NCBs is aimed at facilitating landowners and removing their hassles," explained the land minister.

"This process will be gradually spread across the country by 2005," he added.

Shamsul, at a regular monthly meeting yesterday, directed divisional commissioners and authorities concerned to take appropriate measures for making the new scheme a success.

Landowners, under the reform programmes, would also be allowed to deposit land taxes in advance for more than one year, sources said.

Under a proposed one-stop service, three offices -- survey office, circle office of revenue and sub-registrar's office -- will be brought under a single unit to serve people in selling and purchasing of land. Currently, people have to three different offices, they said.

The reforms are also aimed at computerising the entire land management system and preparing a prescribed form for land registration. The proposed form would include all necessary data and be limited to a single page to ease the registration process.

A tougher law would also be introduced to curb forgery of documents and the sale of a particular piece of land to more than one person, they added.

Peacekeepers due

FROM PAGE 1

there, the bodies will be brought straight back to Dhaka.

A UN chartered aircraft has been kept on standby to fly the dead and if Benin does not have adequate postmortem facility, the bodies will be taken to Sierra Leone for autopsy and then home by December 31.

The ISPR is now waiting for a full report from the nine-member team led by Colonel Fazlul Haq of Bangladesh Battalion-9. "Once we get the report, we can specify schedule for arrival," Lt Col Nazrul said.

The families of the dead are likely to get compensation from the UN in line with convention and Bangladesh army will also provide compensation packages for each family, sources said.

Funded monthly by military staff, the army has a family security scheme that works as a group life insurance policy and a family gets a compensation package in the event of a death of an officer, army sources said.

UN Resident Representative in Bangladesh Jorgen Lissner offered deep condolences to the bereaved and Bangladesh government.

Bangladesh's contribution to peacekeeping and peace building in Sierra Leone and Liberia were one of the best examples of international cooperation, Lissner said.

Jatiya Sangsad whip Syed Wahidul Haq also expressed shock at the death of the officers.

Manufacture

FROM PAGE 12

its next meeting.

"The committee will show the models to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. If she gives her consent, we will recommend the government manufacture auto-rickshaws," Abdul Alim, chairman of the committee, told newsmen after the meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

The committee also asked Progtati authorities to submit a proposal for manufacturing cars.

"Despite the company's capabilities, it could not manufacture a car in the last 30 years, as a vested quarter of the country discouraged it for its own interest," said Alim.

Currently, Atlas manufacturers 1,300 motorcycles and 500 Mishuk a year.

The committee also discussed issues on Chittagong Steel Mills. Alim said the mill was shut down in 1999 because of unnecessary cost, which precipitated the mill into a losing concern.

The chairman shot down the then trade union for the shutdown. "The persons responsible for making the companies losing concerns should be held," he said.

Presided over by Alim, the meeting was also attended by committee members and other officials.

Fears replace hopes

FROM PAGE 1

who had earlier declined to give a figure.

Cemeteries in Bam were overflowing with fully clothed corpses and hundreds of bodies had been tipped into trenches hollowed out by mechanical diggers, witnesses said.

State television said 13,000 bodies had been recovered so far while aid workers estimated more than 100,000 people may have been left homeless.

United Nations Humanitarian Affairs Officer Jesper Lund, heading the U.N. coordination team, said 22 international search and rescue teams were still scouring the ruins for survivors but would probably soon switch to helping those already found.

"There is definitely a very bad situation in the area, and there is no...clear picture," Lund, whose arrival from Tehran had been delayed by transport problems, told Reuters television.

The pre-dawn quake on Friday also injured about 30,000 people when it flattened about 70 percent of the mostly mud-brick buildings in the ancient Silk Road city.

Human security

FROM PAGE 12

respect for the rule of law and justice. "If I was to think of one single thing that is missing here, I would say it's lack of accountability and the rule of law and justice that enables violators to get away with impunity."

Citing recent incidents of religious intolerance including persecution of the Ahmadiyya community and arson attacks on Hindu homes in Shadhanpur, she said the government must safeguard minority rights by resisting such attacks and ensuring an independent investigation into the arson incidents.

She also denounced the torture and custodial deaths during the anti-crime Operation Clean Heart.

"I was told not just by the government but by many civic leaders and ordinary citizens in Dhaka that such an action was essential to reduce urban crime. A year later, crime seems as rampant as ever," she said.

During the two-hour speech, Irene highlighted the post-September 11 global security scenario and its adverse impact on the human rights situation.

She said the US-sponsored 'war on terrorism' has actually worsened global security. "Far from making the world a safer place, the global security doctrine, promulgated by the USA, has made it more dangerous."

"People feel more vulnerable than ever because the roots of insecurity have not been addressed," she observed.

CPD-FBCCI

FROM PAGE 12

The dialogue had an overt objective to critically examine the weaknesses and advantages of the business environment of Bangladesh.

CPD Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya presented the findings of a survey on business confidence in Bangladesh, conducted by the CPD on 81 companies each having a total asset of not less than Tk 10 crore.

The survey found 96.3 percent respondents most emphatic about the absence of public faith in politicians' honesty. Ninety percent respondents indicated that they had to make kickbacks to access public utilities like telephone and electricity, Debapriya reported. As many as 75.3 percent of those surveyed said organised crimes push costs of their businesses up.

Most speakers viewed that onerous administrative regulations, favouritism in policy decisions and contracts, corruption and poor infrastructure at the micro level were among the major drawbacks generating a mismatch between investors' confidence and the country's economic strength.

But, Bangladesh must boost the investors' confidence, as it needs an increased investment inflow to raise the income levels of 50 percent of its population living below the poverty line, they added.

Former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association Anisur Rahman Sinha said though wages in the country were low, it could not compensate for the high cost of corruption, poor infrastructure and governance.

"The country suffered a setback since many programmes initiated by the last BNP government were not carried out by the following regime," Khaleda told the rally organised by local BNP on Hatia Dwp Govern-ment College premises.

Travel agents

FROM PAGE 12

The possible strike will affect the overseas passengers especially non-ballotee Hajj pilgrims, who are being handled by Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (Haab).

The non-ballotee Hajj flights are scheduled to start from Thursday while Biman will resume its flights from Wednesday to ferry ballotee pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

As the travel agencies will stop booking tickets from Thursday, the pilgrims are going to face serious trouble in booking seats for their journey.

Saleh said the problem can be solved if the civil aviation ministry takes proper initiatives.

"We have already informed the civil aviation minister about our reaction to the agency commission cut and requested him to take steps," he said.

Bar, a global apex body of airlines, decided to reduce travel agencies' commission from 9 percent to 7 percent from January 1, 2004.

Bam airport became a sprawling, makeshift hospital and rubble-strewn pavements were lined with injured, some on intravenous drips.

"The number of dead could be far more than 20,000 -- many places are untouched. We are beginning to smell the stench of death. If we haven't cleared the area by the end of the week there will be a threat of epidemics," an Iranian rescuer said.

Reuters witnesses saw some looting when vans of young men armed with pistols and Kalashnikov assault rifles drove into Bam and stole Red Crescent tents, while others on motorbikes chased aid trucks, picking up blankets thrown out by soldiers.

Rescue attempts were complicated by fears of aftershocks, which experts said could be as strong as the first quake and occur at any time over the next few weeks.

The Islamic republic's quick acceptance of help from the international community contrasted with its rejection in 1990 when a quake killed 36,000 people.

It says help will be welcome from everywhere except Israel.

Quoting the World Bank, Irene Khan said the 'war on terrorism' is shifting attention and resources away from the issues of development.

The AI chief accused the United States of undermining the best systems of collective security in the world -- the United Nations and the International Criminal Court.

She said, "We are receiving reports that the US forces in Iraq are adopting tactics such as demolishing the houses of suspects, putting humiliating restrictions on the movement of civilians and failing to investigate killings -- the same tactics used by the Israeli army in the occupied Palestinian territories."

The US seems to be actively encouraging its officials to break the norms of international law by refusing investigation of mass killing by its troops and allies in Afghanistan and ignoring allegations of torture by its soldiers in Iraq.

"There is no doubt that the behaviour of the US has sent a message to others that international law and human rights can be ignored with impunity in the name of security."

She said after the September 11 terrorist attacks, many countries in the name of national security rushed through legislation allowing detention without trial on the basis of secret evidence.

She said the AI would submit a report to the US Supreme Court next spring when it will examine the legality of detaining people in Guantanamo, where the US government is holding over 600 prisoners from Afghanistan and other countries without trial.

On Saddam Hussein's trial, the AI chief said, "We want to see him tried for the terrible atrocities committed during his regime -- but justice will only be served if Saddam is given a fair and open trial in accordance with international standards and without the death penalty."

Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (Bilia) organised the function at its office. Bilia Director Walur Rahman moderated the discussion.

1 killed, 30 hurt in stampede at PM's rally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, from Hatia

One person died and 30 others were injured in a stampede at a public rally of the prime minister at Char Chenga of the island yesterday.

The victim was identified as Mostafijur Rahman, 30. Of the injured, 10 have been admitted to the local health complex in critical conditions.

Speaking at the rally as chief guest, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said her government believes in politics of development and production and is working for continuation of the development process, which is essential for the welfare of the nation.

"The country suffered a setback since many programmes initiated by the last BNP government were not carried out by the following regime," Khaleda told the rally organised by local BNP on Hatia Dwp Govern-ment College premises.

Kalyanpur slum HC orders status quo till Jan 4

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A High Court vacation bench yesterday ordered a status quo at Kalyanpur Poura Bstee (municipal slum) till January 4.

An eviction drive carried out by the House Building Research Institute (HBRI) flattened seven of the nine sections of the slum on December 21 without any prior notice to the slum dwellers, according to the inhabitants of the slum.

The High Court order followed a public interest litigation filed by Ain O Salish Kendra, the Coalition for the Urban Poor, two non-governmental organisations, and two residents of the slum on December 24 challenging the eviction.

Hasina invited to JCD's silver jubilee party

BSS, Dhaka

The Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) yesterday invited Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina to its silver jubilee celebration programme on January 1.

A team of JCD leaders including its President Shahabuddin Latif and General Secretary Azizul Bari Helal went to invite the opposition leader at Sudha Sadan, Hasina's residence, along with some pro-AL Bangladesh Chhatra League leaders.

Having waited for one and a half hours, the JCD team failed to meet the AL chief, Latif told the official news agency later.

Later, they handed over the invitation card to Hasina's press secretary, he added.

"It would have been a happy occasion if we could personally hand over the card to the opposition leader," the JCD president said.

Small trader stabbed dead at Sabujbagh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A small trader was stabbed to death inside his factory allegedly by his employee at North Mugdapara in Sabujbagh yesterday.

Waliullah Pradhan, 25, owner of a belt factory, was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) with stab injuries in his chest and abdomen at around 7:30am. He succumbed to his injuries at around 1:00pm.

Police said Waliullah's employee Mokbul alias Mukul, who used to reside with the former in the tin-shed factory at North Mugdapara, stabbed him at about 5:30am.

On hearing him groaning, locals rushed to the spot and caught Mokbul before turning him over to police.

"My brother fired him a few days ago on charge of stealing money, but he reinstated him at the local traders' request," the victim's brother, Shahidul, told newsmen at the DMCH.

A murder case was filed with Sabujbagh Police Station.

Bremer takes

FROM PAGE 12

But in a pre-taped interview scheduled for transmission here yesterday, Bremer retreated when he learned that it was Blair who had made the claim.

Asked about the claim without being told first of the source, Bremer said: "I don't know where the words come from but that is not what (Iraq Survey Group chief) David Kay has said."

The US-led Iraq Survey Group is hunting for weapons of mass destruction.

"I have read (Kay's) reports so I don't know who said that," Bremer said in an interview on the British ITV1 channel with Jonathan Dimbleby.

"It sounds like a bit of a red herring to me," the American continued. "It sounds like someone who doesn't agree with the policy sets up a red herring then knocks it down."

But Bremer retreated when told the claims were made by none other than President George W. Bush's staunchest ally Blair.

"There is actually a lot of evidence that had been made public," he said.

Blair said this month the Iraq Survey Group had found "massive evidence of a huge system of clandestine laboratories" in Iraq.

2 Iraqi children

FROM PAGE 12

machineguns in a coordinated assault on two bases of the US-led coalition and government offices housing local police, the head of a Polish-led force in southern Iraq said.

"This was a planned, coordinated and massed attack," the Polish PAP news agency quoted General Andrzej Tyszkiewicz as saying. "In all cases, the suicide drivers were shot dead before they could strike their targets."

Continuing an offensive aimed at stifling widespread guerrilla assaults, US troops seized 10 people in overnight raids in Baquba, site of recent attacks against them.

Intelligence unit

FROM PAGE 1

amounted to only Tk 21 crore.

As an example of how much a restaurant can pay if it is honest, Saifur mentioned that the newly launched fast-food joint Pizza Hut paid Tk 4 lakh in VAT in just three days. "Therefore, we should intensify the monitoring of hotels and restaurants," he reasoned.

VAT payments by other service providers were even more frustrating. The community centres of the city paid only Tk 35 lakh and the beauty parlours only Tk 18 lakh during the period. But these establishments are doing a highly intense business, the minister said.

"You should collect VAT from them by scrutinising their sales records," he instructed the NBR officials.

"We want to pursue self-financed projects in gas and infrastructure sectors. That is why we want to strengthen our revenue collection," the finance minister told journalists after the meeting.

Akheri Munajat today

FROM PAGE 1

Hossain, Zobairul Hasan and Ahmad Lat of India and Moulana Mohammad Hossain of Bangladesh took part in the discussion yesterday.

They called upon the Muslims to be enlightened and perform their duties following the teachings of Islam.

The president will attend the congregation and offer a Munajat from a special dais erected at the northern end of the Ijtima ground.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is scheduled to join the Munajat from a separate stage set up on the roof of a nearby Bata factory building along with her senior cabinet colleagues and high civil and military officials.

Leader of the Opposition and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina will offer a Munajat along with senior party leaders under a canopy erected on the roof of the nearby Ashraf Textile Mills.

Thousands of women will also join the Munajat from the rooftops of nearby mills, factories and high-rises and from residential houses at Uttara and Tongi.

The Gazipur district administration and the government's communication directorate installed several hundred loudspeakers on the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway between Cheraf Ali Market in Tongi and Azampur in Uttara and along the road leading to Tongi Railway Station for people who will not be able to make it to the Ijtima

Dhaka gets time

FROM PAGE 1

want to force the issue (on Bangladesh)."

Thomas emphasised views of both pro- and anti-labour union investors, as their opinions he hoped would help the government decide on the issue, meeting sources said.

The meeting that also featured ministers of commerce and industries, state minister for labour, principal secretary to the prime minister and other policymakers seemed to have found a new direction.

"We have sought time (from the US) to find an alternative solution through understanding of all parties. We shall sit again and reach an understanding," said Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, who chaired the meeting.

On the government position on trade union (TU), Saifur said, "We are looking into different aspects of allowing trade union and the impact of withdrawal of GSP (generalised system of preference) by the US. We don't want to scare investors. We don't want to deprive the workers of their democratic rights either."

"Many countries had faced similar paradox. We will see how they handled the crisis," Saifur added.

The Bepza act finds trade union illegal in EPZs and the government has to amend the law to adjust, he pointed out.

Finance ministry sources said the WB country representative, Christine I Wallich, agreed on a government request to coordinate the issue.

"We don't oppose trade union. But we are afraid of the way Bangladeshi trade union works. This will affect production in EPZs," said leading EPZ investor Youngone Chairman Kihak Sung, who represented the investors.

Two months ago, the US ambassador declared that unless Bangladesh allowed trade union in the industrial zones by January, it would not get GSP facilities in garment exports.

"The US will not extend this deadline," he said, adding: "Bangladesh and the US signed a GSP treaty back in 1991. After it ended in 2001, Washington extended it by another three years on the condition that unless Bangladesh allows trade union by then, it will no longer get GSP facilities."

Ansar-Shibir nexus

FROM PAGE 12

general of Ansar.

The four ICS activists arrested on the specific charge of bomb-making to carry out subversive activities under the umbrella of Al-Mujahiden, an extremist outfit based in Jamalpur and Sherpur districts, will be taken to the JIC (Joint Interrogation Cell) for further questioning, sources said.

Joint forces recovered 16 powerful handmade bombs, bomb-making materials and brochures from the hotel and police are looking for hotel proprietors Raju and Touhidul Islam Azad.

Nazimul Islam, district adjutant of Ansar, said all Ansars had been disarmed after 20 rifles were looted from the storeroom of Daulatpur Jute Mills on April 24 and they now only carry clubs.

Official sources said many of the 5,000 ansars including some 2,800 battalion ansars in the southwestern zone have connections with outlaws.

Police sources said 838 extremists in the southwestern region surrendered to police in 1999 under general amnesty and 766 of them were inducted into the Ansar. Of them, 133 deserted the force and 60 others were sacked on various