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POINT # COUNTERPOINT

Mounting traffic hazards Dhaka city likely to be abandoned soon?

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news item published recently in different dailies **L** of Dhaka says that "Vehicle import increases 54.78 percent in fiscal year 2005" commenting that the country's motor vehicle import increased by 54.78 percent in 2004-2005 fiscal year. Quoting the Chief Controller of Export and Import statistics, it states that dealers imported all kinds of new and old motor vehicles worth of US\$117.70 million (equivalent to Taka 765 crore) during the period against US\$76.04 million import in 2003-2004 fiscal

It has been reported that during 2004-05, vehicles such as scooter, human haulers and three wheelers worth of US\$43.99 million were imported, clocking over 300 percent growth. Side by side, cars worth of US\$15.32 million, buses worth of US\$11.47 million, trucks worth of US\$15.95 million and motor cycles valued at US\$26.19 million posting 20.54 percent, 19.89 percent, 15 percent and 16.58 percent growth respectively, were imported. The statistics further reveal that the import of minibuses decreased as dealers imported minibuses valued at US\$4.79 million in 2004-05 fiscal year against US\$7.96 million in 2003-04.

Another important aspect of road transportation vis-á-vis traffic and related other issues very closely related to each other is: issuance of route permits for presently available 740 routes all over the country, to different categories of motorised vehicles like bus, minibus etc. Statistical data of route permits issued in Bangladesh from BRTA Headquarters, Narayanganj Zone and 19 circles all over the country in 2004 has been collected from BRTA recently. Traffic and transportation issues of Dhaka city have been dealt at length by different quarters which include Dhaka Integrated Transport Study (DITS), DUTP/DTCB, DCC, Bangladesh Planning Commission, consultants, experts, different researchers, development partners and others since '90s or earlier, but unfortunately the route permit related matters did hardly get any importance in their studies/recommendations. To my knowledge, none including myself hardly gave any indepth attention to Route Permit affairs and its intricacies. Without appropriate attention to this issue, steps to reduce traffic hazards vis-á-vis environment issues of Dhaka city and the country, are bound to remain incomplete and incomprehensive. I understand, there is no appropriately designed

1996, a total of 12476 motor cars (highest number in a single year) were registered in Bangladesh-whereas the share of Dhaka city in it was 8366 motor cars. In the calendar year 2004, a total of 5410 motor cars were registered in Bangladesh in which the Dhaka city's share was 4734, which is 87.5 percent of the total. The trend of other calendar years starting from 1997 to 2003 is almost the same, i.e. of the total registered motor cars in Bangladesh, Dhaka's share was about 85 percent or more in every year. It means that, Dhaka city is abnormally being crowded with influx of different types of motor cars and without any planning by

the authorities concerned. Further, the report of 300 percent increase of smaller vehicles like scooters, human haulers, and three wheelers during 2004-05 fiscal year in comparison to previous fiscal year is alarming. And if this trend goes unabated (and there is no reason why this trend will not continue), major portion of Dhaka city roads will be occupied by these categories of vehicles before the next general election likely to be held in 2007. Many of the sensible people of Dhaka city and the country as well, are confused whether there is, or was, any appropriate authority to look after this 'danger' which is getting manifested in so many dimensions creating hazards like environmental pollutions, road blockades, economic stagnation and standstill situation of 'developmentforward-march' of thousands of entrepreneurs etc. working in Dhaka city at present.

Similarly, the number of taxicabs registered in Bangladesh in 2003 was 5020 and Dhaka city's share in it was 4980 i.e. 99 percent of the taxicabs were, as it appears, meant for Dhaka city. The total number of taxicabs registered in the country till December, 2004, is 11472 (and Dhaka city's share in it was 9892). Of the total taxicabs in operation in the country, about 70 percent were of Indian origin, mostly of low/bad quality responsible for air-pollution. The taxicabs service has not been reviewed by any relevant authority since 1997-98 when it started operation in massive way, to find out its positive and negative aspects for taking appropriate measures.

Interestingly, as record shows, there were 27510 registered buses in the country till 1994 and during periods starting from 1995 calendar year to 2004 calendar year (10 years), only 3964 buses were added to the 'Bus-fleet'. And during these 10 calendar years, Dhaka city's share was 3124 buses. Similarly, during fiscal year 1995-2004 period, 9979 minibuses were

The government has invested hundreds of crores of taka (mainly loan money) for vigorous improvement of city roads, but the issue of the proportion of the number of motorised vehicles vis-a-vis availability of road-area in Dhaka city has been overlooked so long, which has resulted to the present traffic complications of serious magnitude. Will the government find out some time to attend these issues? If not, there are apprehensions that the capital city of Dhaka will have to be abandoned within next few years.

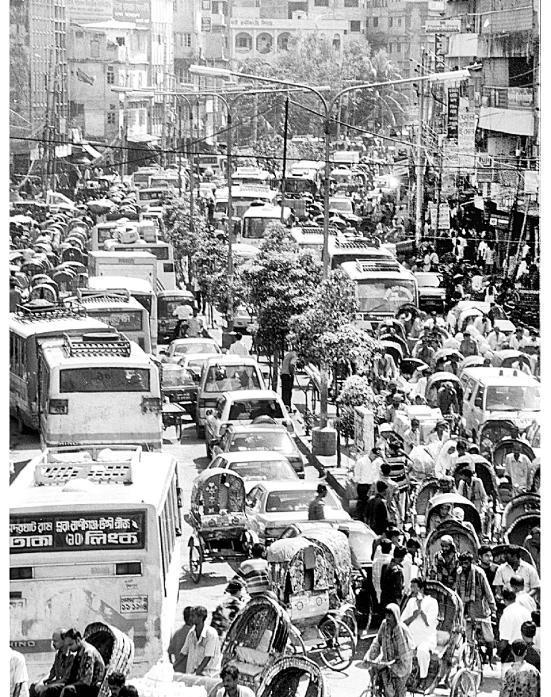
The above is one side of the story. Statistics collected from relevant sources state that the metropolitan city area is about 220 sq km and total length of roads, of different categories, within metropolitan area is 1286 km which is narrated below:

a)Primary Roads-6 1 . 4 4 Kilometers b)SecondaryRoads-1 0 8 . 2 0 Kilometers c)ConnectorRoads-2 2 1 . 3 5 Kilometers d)Local Roads-573.74 Kilometers

e)NarrowRoads-3 3 1 . 2 7 Kilometers

Source: RMMS: 2003 (DTCB) During 1996, the total length of Dhaka City Roads was about 5 percent less than what it is now (2005). During last one decade, or to be more specific, from 1999 to 2005 (June) -- a large number of Dhaka City roads namely a) Progoti Sarani, b) Hare Road, Kamal Ataturk Avenue, Phoenix Road, College Road, Gulshan Road, c) Mazar Road, Darus Salam Road, Shaymoly Road, Mirpur 1 to Mirpur 10, Shamoli-Russel Square,

Sonargaon Road, d) Mirpur 11, Mirpur 12 and Mirpur 10, Taltola, e) Tongi Bridge to Bypass including 107 Bridge, f) Saidabad-Rampura, g) Mohakhali-Mogbazar intersection and Gulshan Avenue, h) Russel Square-Azimpur and Mazar Road-Gabtoli Bus Terminal, i) Taltola to Hotel Sonargaon via Khamar Bari, Farmgate, j) Staff Road to Farmgate intersections: Kakoli, Chairman Bari, Jahangir Gate, Allenburi and Bijov Sarani, k) Zero point-North South Road-Navabazar-Chittranjan Avenue-Bahadur Shah Park and Dholai Khal Road, 1)



Bangla Motor-Mogbazar-Malibag-Kamlapur-Atish Dipankar Road and Bangla Motor-Shahbag-Matsha Bhaban-Curzon Hall, were developed under DUTP (Dhaka Urban Transport Project) and appreciable and improved roads are visible in almost all corners of

the capital city at present. Besides, 22 intersections alongwith 7.5 km adjacent roads to different intersections at different points were improved vigorously. In addition, footpaths measuring 158.01 km in total all over Dhaka City Corporation area at different points were improved substantially

Three Inter District Bus Terminals (at Saidabad, Gabtoli and Mohakhali) were improved (re-constructed) at the cost of Tk 47.81 crores. In Motijheel and Dilkhusha area 22000 sqm parking space was improved. Flood damaged roads measuring 41.50 km were repaired during 1999 to 2003 fiscal years. Nine foot over bridges were constructed during 2002 to 2005. For Non-motorised Transport (NMT) lanes measuring 19.47 km were improved. Besides, Mohakhali flyover (1011.797m) was constructed (total construction cost Tk 126 crore only) and completed in November 2004. Besides, 59 nos. intersections were signalised (works completed in fiscal year 2004-2005) at the cost of Tk 13.62 crore only.

All these development activities were carried out under DUTP funded out of loan money received from the World Bank. The total costs for all these road-related physical development activities were Tk 546.58 crores only till June 2005. Roads and Highway Department (RHD) and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) are the implementing agencies of DUTP. Besides, the second flyover (2.2 km) was constructed at Khilgaon recently at a cost of Tk. 80 crore only out of GOB fund and the implementing agency was Local Govt. Engineering Department (LGED).

In the above paragraphs, an exhaustive and almost a full picture of development works on Dhaka city roads have been narrated. But in spite of all these physical developments, the movement of vehicles on different city roads (includ-/IP roads getting complicated and more and more hazardous, day by day. The government in the Ministry of Communication or Ministry of LGRD&C appears to be least concerned about the worsening road traffic/transport movement situation in Dhaka city. The Ministry of

Finance (Board of Revenue) or the Ministry of Commerce, (Chief Controller of Exports & Imports), as appears, are doing routine works facilitating import of small motorised vehicles (new and old) every year, which is continuously adding to traffic jams of serious nature every day on Dhaka and other city roads. The problem is, the Ministry of Communication or its Chief Executive has been giving declarations after declarations, since early 2002 that magnetic train service would be introduced between Dhaka-Chittagong which tantamounts to mockery to the city dwellers of both Dhaka and Chittagong. This is very 'helpless' situation for country. The authorities responsible to

facilitate traffic movement in Dhaka city (and in the country as well) are least bothered or almost unconcerned as to the fast deteriorating traffic system which may collapse at any time almost in totality. The apprehended 'dooms day' is heavily knocking at the door spontaneously and continuous import of motorised vehicle every year (about 85% for Dhaka city) at an increasing rate, is fast adding to the traffic hazards problem at an increasing speed. Removal of rickshaws from the city roads will hardly be helpful in improving traffic movements in the city at

present. Import of small vehicles like motor cars, jeeps, taxicabs, scooters, three wheelers, motor cycles or even minibus, may be stopped for Dhaka city at least for next five years as a first step to address the already saturated traffic hazards complications. Then regorous and meticulous technical examination of the 'road-worthyness' of all the buses and minibuses (which are more than ten years old) needs to be carried out (not by BRTA alone) with the help of appropriate technical teams, and non-road worthy buses/minibuses may be removed from operation on any road. The estimated 300 nos. of illegal rickshaw making factories, situated mainly in old Dhaka, may be dismantled immediately and at least 50 percent of the total rickshaws now in operation on secondary and connector roads, in Dhaka city, may be removed within next few months. CNG-three wheelers may be limited to 10.000 nos. on Dhaka city roads by June 2006. Side by side, the government may create facilities for import of duty-free 500 CNG buses by private entrepreneurs.

Side by side, as per proposal of the IAP (Immediate Action Plan) suggested in DITS some twelve years back (1993), there is a dire necessity to expand bus services, but at the same time it is equally necessary to involve rationalisation of services to ensure that optimal vehicle sizes are used on all routes. The transport industry is very fragmented in its structure. This possibly explains the lack of coherent service planning and innovation within the industry as a whole. In all forms, public trans-

port owners operate a few vehicles leading to fierce competition on the street without even little concern for the real needs of the users. A balance is needed to encourage competition between providers on the one hand and use of government intervention to force industry restructuring on the other. There is a need to recognise that none of the parties wins in an environment where public resources, roads, and bus pick-up areas -- become a chaotic marketplace for service providers to jostle for customers. Inadequate past investment in the transport sector has not only caused the infrastructure capacity to increasingly lag behind the growth of transport demand, but also exposed this transport system to a serious rate of deterioration.

There are recommendations from the experts for restructuring of the industry to encourage the formation of a small number of large operators, rather than a large number of very small operators as at present, and at the same time, increased enforcement of regulations aimed at eradicating inefficient, unsafe and ineffective practices which prevail in the current industry.

Some view Bangladesh to be a fledgling democracy which is still trying to find out a workable balance between the government and opposition co-existence and political deliberations. Strikes and demonstrations are common feature of political expression and often these activities spill over to vandalistic destruction of transport assets. The city wide transport strikes, which occur from time to time, are often called for reasons totally unrelated to concerns in the transport industry. Because of the risk of mob violence, investors in the industry, bus owners are hardly willing to outlay large sums on high quality vehicles on Dhaka city roads, for fear of losing their investments through wanton destruction at times by some politically motivated violent mob. Until law and order can be better guaranteed, the level of investment required to upgrade bus services in Dhaka is not likely to come from the private sector.

In all these endeavours, the role of the government is paramount. The government has invested hundreds of crores of taka (mainly loan money) for vigorous improvement of city roads, but the issue of the proportion of the number of motorised vehicles vis-a-vis availability of road-area in Dhaka city has been overlooked so long, which has resulted to the present traffic complications of serious magnitude. Will the government find out some time to attend these issues? If not, there are apprehensions that the capital city of Dhaka will have to be abandoned within next few vears.

standard procedure of issuing route permits to different catego ries of vehicles by BRTA.

The statistics relating to year wise registered motorized vehicle all over the country in general and the Dhaka city in particular, reveal that Dhaka city's total registered vehicles is 44.72 percent of the country's total. In the calendar year

registered in the country in which Dhaka city's share was 5819. Of the registered buses in operation in Dhaka city and the country, possibly 70-80 percent are more than 15-20 years old, and many of them are responsible for environment pollutions, road accidents, road blockades and so on.

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Towards lasting peace in Asia

NURUL HUDA

HE exchange of new year's greetings between leaders of China and India is expected to pave the way for lasting peace in Asia. The language of the messages between the leaders of the two Asian powers should be taken with seriousness as they are major players not only in Asia but also in global politics.

If they are sincere and comply with the commitments that they have made to each other, Asia should expect to witness rapid economic growth in the coming years as peace and progress are inter-related. The general perception is, if there is stable peace in this continent, development is sure to follow.

Some of the countries of Asia were so long facing problems in providing basic needs to their people. Today with the passage of time this situation is changing. Some of the Asian countries have been witnessing rapid growth in different sectors including agriculture, communication, education and also health.

Asia has long been embroiled in conflicts for reasons best known to the powers that are using Asian countries to serve their selfish interests. With the exchange of greetings between the leaders of China and India, it is hoped that there would be gradual end to hostility as well as efforts towards improvement of ties between the two major powers in particular, and among other Asian countries in general. It is believed that if China and India are sincere in their pledges made to each other in their greetings, other countries of the continent are likely to shun the path of conflicts.

The world will gradually is ready to work with India to become a better place to live in if continuously deepen the contents of our bilateral relations there is peace and stability in Asia, which is home to about 40 per cent and push forward the Chinaof the world's population. Asian India Strategic and Cooperative countries were kept engaged Partnership in an all round and against each other by the superin-depth way.' powers during the end of the Cold

Indian Prime Minister Dr. War. Today, the scenario has Manmohan Singh in his message changed and there is no reason to his Chinese counterpart Wen why Asian countries should fight Jiabao said," the fast developing with each other. Instead, they ties between India and China was should engage themselves in an important determinant for the improving their condition peace and security as well as through enhanced cooperation development and prosperity of among themselves. Asia and the world.

interaction especially with our larger Asian neighbourhood. We need to create linkage and interdependencies ensuring a win-win for all.

When European Union (EU) could make tangible progress in forging cooperation among its member countries and enjoy the fruits, regional bodies of Asia excepting ASEAN, are yet to deliver the goods. North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) has also made some progresses towards cooperation among countries of

The peace process initiated between India and Pakistan in 2003 would continue to its cherished goal -- establishment of lasting peace. The resolution of conflicts between the two nuclear neighbours will indeed play an important role towards stable peace in Asia. There is need for end to conflicts and irritation among China, India and Pakistan who are known nuclear powers.

The regional groupings like ASEAN, SAARC, BIMSTEC and ACD have already made some exercises in identifying areas of cooperation. Now it is time that the decision makers sit together for quick implementation of the programmes in areas already

identified so that common masses could enjoy the fruits.

Chinese President Hu Jintao in his message to his Indian counterpart APJ Abdul Kalam, said "an everlasting China-India friendship not only serves the fundamental interests of our two countries and peoples but also contributes to peace, stability and development in Asia and the entire world." Jintao said that India and China are major developing countries with great influence in the world adding " China the block.

Both the leaders have, as it appears from their messages, made their intentions clear to work together not only for mutual benefits but also to contribute towards securing a lasting world As the role of Pakistan is impor-

tant for stable peace in Asia, the speech of Shaukat Aziz at the recently held 13th SAARC Summit in Dhaka may be recalled. He described political disputes and tensions in the region as the prime impediment to SAARC's success. He said members of the regional grouping have remained embroiled in conflict management.

"We need to move toward conflict resolution." The Pakistan Prime Minister in his inaugural speech said, "We must adopt an inclusive approach and be open to

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since their independence in1947, two of which were over Kashmir. The peace move between the two SAARC member countries was initiated in 2003 Both sides have already taken some confidence building measures like reopening of bus, air and rail links and holding of foreign ministerial and foreign secretary level dialogues for resolving irritants aimed at the establishment of stable peace. Despite the recent 'war of words' between two nuclear rivals the third round of foreign secretary level talks was scheduled to begin in New Delhi from the third week of the current month. How the peace process initiated in 2003 would continue is likely to depend on the outcome of

the dialogue between the two neighbours.

> One of the reasons of 'war of words' between the two sides is over Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's recent proposal in an interview to TV news channel CNN-IBN for withdrawal of troops from three cities of the Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir as part of efforts to resolve the Kashmir dispute.

Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Navtej Sarna reacting to the Pakistani proposal said that India viewed Pakistan's implementation of its earlier commitment (January,2004) to end cross border terrorism as "unconditional". Musharraf said if India demilitarized three cities of Jammu and Kahsmir -- summer capital Srinagar, Kupawara and Baramulla, he would ensure end of militancy in those areas.

As regards Indian position on it Sarna said that any demilitarisation or deployment of security forces within the territory of India "is a sovereign decision and cannot be dictated by a foreign government."

In the backdrop of such developments it is yet expected that the peace process initiated between the two countries in 2003, would continue to its cherished goal -the establishment of lasting peace. The resolution of conflicts between the two nuclear neighbours -- India and Pakistan -- will indeed play an important role towards stable peace in Asia. There is need for end to conflicts and irritation among China, India and Pakistan who are known nuclear powers.

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Unrest in Baluchistan

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

ALUCHISTAN is endowed with rich natural resources, including gas, oil, gold and copper. Strategically it has importance as well. It has mountainous borders and passes along Iran and Afghanistan on the West while miles of maritime coast stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea in the south as well. Historically Baluchistan never became part of Mughal empire and they fought against the Hindus and gained influence in the Punjab and Sindh. When Mughal power declined they took on the Sikhs, the Maratha and finally the British who arrived in 1841. Baluchistan is wellknown as transit route where alternative route of Euro-Asian highway passes from Zahedan in Iran to Taflan in Baluchistan. Another alternative route passes from Kandahar in Afghanistan to Chaman in Baluchistan.

The policy of military and Punjabi elite group, majority segment of the population in Pakistan, dominate the political, economic and military sector of the country which actually deprived the Baluchs of legitimate share in administration, military and political arena. Baluchistan has a population of over 7.5 million of which Baluchs constitute 4 percent, but are less educated. No systematic method has been adopted to educate Baluchs to face the reality in life. Baluchs are basically nomad and the tribal organisation is hierarchical. Each tribe is headed by a Sardar.

Baluchistan comprising of 343,000 square kilometers -- much bigger than Bangladesh -- could be divided into three sub-regions. These are: the belt comprising Hub, Lasbella and Khizdar is developed industrially by mainly Karachiite business magnates; the coastal belt of Makran and Gwadar is influenced by non-Baluchs and Eastern Baluchistan is completely tribal. Apart from political discrimination, attention has not been paid to develop poor sections of Baluchistan at par, for example, with Hub, Lasbella and Khizdar. Here the influence of tribal leaders is minimal whereas eastern Baluchistan is completely under the domination of tribal leaders. And this part of Baluchistan is very important economically because the Sui gas fields are located in this area. This particular region of Baluchistan is the nucleus of the insurgency. In order to restrain the influence of tribal leaders Pakistan administration needs to concentrate developing this region in line with Gwadar in the coastal belt region.

Gwadar has been developed with the assistance of China. It has become a modern port city. Many business centres, factories and hotels are being constructed. This coastal belt region, however, is free from the domination of Baluch tribals. Political leaders are, by and large, of Iranian descend. This region of Baluchistan is known as an area of

underground mafia. Fairy tale about the powerful mafia group is prevalent in Pakistan. Makran in Baluchistan and Landikotal in North West Frontier are known as smuggling dens. It is understood that their influence is on the wane as the policy of urbanisation is in the process of implementation.

According to a report, there had been 261 bomb blasts and 167 rocket firing in 2005 in Baluchistan. Particular targets are military cantonments in Quetta, capital of Baluchistan and installations of Sui gas fields. Heavy exchange of fires between paramilitary forces and armed tribal men were reported in the first week of this month (January) at the gas fields which caused death of eight paramilitary personnel. This incident encouraged military regime to reinforce military presence in Sui gas region.

Following this episode President Pervez Mushrraf had been to Quetta and Kohlu, a restive area while gunship helicopters have been in action in two tribal areas: Kalat and Chaghai and a land and air operation was conducted at Kohlu and Mohmand areas to cow down the tribal insurgents. Musharraf's public meeting at Kohlu was marred by hurling of grenades. This has also caused in increase in the number of military operations in Baluchistan. Pakistan's military authorities have planned to set up more cantonments

Tribal leaders have demanded equitable pie in the revenue of gas and other mineral resources ,which are located in this region for which they have been fighting for years, and also dismantling of army cantonments. In 1970, a war of independence was launched by Baluchs which lasted several years. Recent flare up of violence is the result of the gangrape of a woman doctor at a state-owned gas plant. Tribal leaders claim that military officers did this nuisance while some other people are arrested instead.

Pakistan officials said that the government has held me talks with tribal leaders and has sought to demonstrate that the government was planning to develop the impoverished province. At the same breath President Pervez Musharraf has given warning that repeat of 1970's operation could not be ruled out if violence continues. The uprising of tribal people was gunned down by military operation under the command of Gen. Tikka Khan, who earned the name of butcher Tikka Khan when thousands of Baluchs were

It is expected that President Pervez Musharraf would follow the path of political solution rather than military action, but the trend of blaming India for fanning violence in Baluchistan does not speak of that spirit as of

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