

Mounting traffic hazards

Dhaka city likely to be abandoned soon?

KARAR MAHMUDUL HASSAN

News item published recently in different dailies of Dhaka says that "Vehicle import increases 54.78 percent in fiscal year 2005"...

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...

Another important aspect of road transportation vis-a-vis traffic and related other issues very closely related to each other is: issuance of route permits for presently available 740 routes over the country...

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...

1996, a total of 12476 motor cars (highest number in a single year) were registered in Bangladesh...

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...

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.

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)...

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- 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...



Bangla Motor-Mogbazar-Malibag-Kamlapur-Atish Dipankar Road and Bangla Motor-Shahbag-Matsha Bhaban-Curzon Hall, were developed under DUTP...

Besides, 22 intersections along with 7.5 km adjacent roads to different intersections at different points were improved vigorously.

Three Inter District Bus Terminals (at Saidabad, Gabtoli and Mohakhali) were improved (re-constructed) at the cost of Tk 47.81 crores.

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.

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 (including VIP roads) are continuously getting complicated and more and more hazardous, day by day.

Finance (Board of Revenue) or the Ministry of Commerce, (Chief Controller of Exports & Imports), as it appears, are doing routine works facilitating import of small motorised vehicles (new and old) every year...

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.

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.

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).

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.

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 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.

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...

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Towards lasting peace in Asia

NURUL HUDA

THE 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.

The world will gradually become a better place to live in if there is peace and stability in Asia, which is home to about 40 percent of the world's population. Asian countries were kept engaged against each other by the superpowers during the end of the Cold War.

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."

is ready to work with India to continuously deepen the contents of our bilateral relations and push forward the China-India Strategic and Cooperative Partnership in an all round and in-depth way."

Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in his message to his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao said, "the fast developing ties between India and China was an important determinant for the peace and security as well as development and prosperity of Asia and the world."

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 peace.

As the role of Pakistan is important for stable peace in Asia, the speech of Shaikat 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.

"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

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

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 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.

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India and Pakistan have fought three wars since their independence in 1947, 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.

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 Kashmir -- 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.

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

BALUCHISTAN 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.

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.

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.

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 descent. 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 Musharraf had been to Quetta and Kohlu, a restive area while gunship helicopters have been in action in two tribal areas: Kalat and Chagai 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 increase in the number of military operations in Baluchistan. Pakistan's military authorities have planned to set up more cantonments there.

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 gang-rape of a woman doctor at a state-owned gas plant. Tribal leaders claim that military officers did this injustice while some other people are arrested instead.

Pakistan officials said that the government has held some 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 killed.

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 now.

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