Down to Earth

The pinch of municipal taxes

By Khalilur Rahman



NO WAY OUT: The surface drain, constructed recently by Dhaka City Corporation at Khilgaon, has no outlet. -Star photo

A landlord or a tenant whoever you be, you are certain to feel the pinch of municipal taxes if you live anywhere within the 90 square mile metropolitan city.

The Dhaka Municipal Corporation, upgraded to City Corporation last year imposes taxes directly on three counts - holding, conservancy and street lights, on the owners of houses within its limits.

The owners who have let out their holdings, in turn, share the tax load with the tenants. Thus both are affected.

The total number of holdings within the corporation area is now one lakh thirty five thousand six hundred. The Corporation realised taxes of Taka 50 crore from these holdings last year.

Let us now look into the rationale of the imposition of municipal taxes and services rendered by the Corporation to its 60-lakh population.

We recently interviewed 60 taxpayers and over 100 tenants to assess the impact of taxes and amenities provided to them by the City Corporation.

All of them expressed their total dissatisfaction at the services they are getting from the Corporation in their respective localities, both in the old and the new metropolitan areas. Piling of garbage, overflowing of silted drains and no street lights in many places are some of the common problems often faced by the city dwellers.

There are some areas where garbage rots on the open through fares for days and household waste water remains stagnant in the absence of drains.

Of the persons interviewed. we cite the experience of one house owner who has pursued his case to the last in respect of taxes imposed by the Corporation. His ordeal is not yet over.

Twenty years ago this 60year-old man belonging to the middle income group built a two-storey house with a covered area of 1000 square feet with a loan from the House Building Finance Corporation (HBFC).

The existing rent he receives from a tenant on the first floor is Taka 3,500 per month. He later on constructed two small rooms on the second floor without kitchen to accommodate his family members in 1985.

In 1974 he used to pay municipal taxes at the rate of Taka 23 per quarter. In 1980 the tax was increased to Taka 199. A fresh rise took place at the rate of Taka 700 per quar-

BSC vessel

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lodged a complaint with the

Singapore port authorities

against the BSC-owned vessel

seeking their intervention in

realising the fuel bill that has

sel, chartered by a Chilean or-

ganisation, reached the

Singapore port on Wednesday,

When contacted, the BSC

finance director told The Daily

Star that a step had been taken

to release the ship after clear-

ing the outstanding fuel bill.

The BSC may incur a daily loss

of over 11,000 US dollars if

the detention continues, the

the BSC source said.

source added.

The 16,771 DWT-BSC ves-

remained unpaid since long.

ter in 1985. He was then suddenly served a notice last year by the Corporation asking him to pay holding taxes at the rate of Taka 2100 per quarter. He became puzzled as no alteration or addition to the building was made nor was there any rental hike.

The owner told the Star that the Corporation, however. offers everybody a chance to appeal. But in reviewing a case the Corporation does not follow any set principles as far as I could learn in the course of filing an appeal", the landlord added.

On previous occasions appeals filed in plain paper by the residents were entertained. But from last year the Corporation began to sell printed forms at Taka 10 each for filing an appeal.

The owner bought one and at a later date set for reviewing appeals of his locality, he stood in a long queue at the Corporation office. After over an hour's waiting in line his turn came

He faced some grim-faced. tight-lipped men sitting around a table and one of them handed him over a plain sheet of paper and asked for his signature. His turn ended and the next man entered.

Several months later the landlord received a revised quarterly bill for Taka 1800 from the Corporation detailing the charges on account of conservancy, holding and street

He started making payments at the revised rate and decided to make final a appeal to the Divisional Commissioner who is acting as the head of the Corporation after the fall of the Ershad regime.

But it is another difficult job to file an appeal to this highest

First of all, the owner paid 75 per cent of the total amount of four quarters in advance on the basis of revised rate (Taka 1800 per quarter) as required in case of such an appeal. One day he stayed at the Corporation counter for four hours to deposit the money prior to submission the appeal. But returned in vain because the man behind the counter was not available.

He went to the Corporation office next day and managed to deposit the amount in exchange of 'tips'. Thus the appeal was made to the Divisional Commissioner's office and after three months his case was heard.

The judgement will not be available before the middle of June next, he was told by an office staff.

Formalities fulfilled by this landlord for submission of his prayer for revision of taxes are applicable in all such cases.

'Unless one comes to an 'understanding' with the concerned functionaries of the Corporation the chance of genuine reduction of the abnormal tax hike is almost nil the disgusted landlord told me quoting his own experience.

Now some words about services. The road in front of his house is littered with garbage and there is no dust

In the absence of proper drainage waste water flowing out of the adjoining houses remains stagnant most of the

For the last decade a group of neighbours led by him pursuaded the municipality to construct a pucca surface drain to flush out household and rain water. But the drain is yet to be fully constructed. In the last eight years the

municipal authority invited tender four times for constructing the drain as demanded by the local people. Then there was silence. Recently the job was undertaken and left half done. A drain was constructed, indeed but with no outlet (photo).

The result is discouraging. People of the locality raise weekly subscriptions and hire sweepers on their own for draining out stagnant stinking water from the road. Kneedeep water accumulates on the road even after a moderate

At many places in the entire locality street lights do not glow and miscreants find it convenient to rob the unwary passersby.

Most of the time the victims do not report cases to the

City corporation version on taxes

A senior official of the revenue department of the Corporation told The Daily Star that regular assessment is carried out before imposing taxes on the basis of annual valuation of each holding. It is a continuous process.

Normally, assessment is done every five years. But in case of addition, alteration of a holding and rental income from it call for fresh assessment in order to increase the tax rate. When his attention was drawn to the case we have narrated here where there was no addition, alteration or rental hike, the official replied that the holding needs assessment'.

Biswas BNP's candidate

From Page 1 Col. 8 night. The meeting was held at Corporation (BSC) source said. the residence of Prime The detention order came when a Singapore-based Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. bunker company 'Ben Marine'

placed source, the decision had already been communicated to the Acting President by Begum Zia.

former President Mohammadullah and former Speaker Mirza Golam Hafiz also came up for discussion. But due to objection raised by most members of the Standing Committee their names were dropped.

According to a reliable source, the BNP leaders tried to obtain an assurance from the Acting President that he would continue in the office as Acting President till the holding of presidential election or

liament. cided to float a candidate for

When asked to comment on a situation like this, Shamsul Huda Chowdhury said it will create problem to run the order of the day in the inaugu-

house will have to be asked for a division. But that will not be good for the nation, he added. He said the choice of Speaker and Deputy Speaker should be unanimous.

JCD to keep an eye on BNP leaders

By Sohel Manzur

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of BNP, has decided to keep on eye on the leaders of BNP. especially the Members of Parliament.

The decision was taken at a recent meeting of the Central Convening Committee held at its Dhanmondi office to help Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia detect undestrable elcments within the party. sources said.

According to the source JCD wants the BNP government to be free from corruption and will look into allegations, if advanced by anyone in future, against any BNP leader

The matters will be confidential and confined within the JCD leaders, some of the BNP leaders and the Chairperson the source added.

The meeting observed that JCD has played a significant role in upholding the ideology and image of BNP barring some untoward incidents caused by intra and inter party conflicts.

Tax on holdings

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regularities, corruption and mismanagement practised during the last nine years' autocratic rule in different ministries, divisions and corporations, to establish an honest, corruption-free and dynamic administration to fulfil the pre-election pledges of the party.

The meeting was informed that steps had already been taken to economically rehabilitate the families who lost their members during the anti-autocratic movement and others who were injured and affected otherwise during the movement last year.

The Council of Ministers was informed programmes for overall development of rural areas had been undertaken including reconstruction of roads and installation of rural electrifica-

Mass literacy programme of shaheed president Ziaur Rahman which remained suspended during the nine years of autocratic rule will be reintroduced soon, the meeting was told.

The Council of Ministers made a call to the patriotic people to identify miscreants and terrorists in their respective areas and to hand them over to local enforcing agencies to improve the law and order situation in the country which had deteriorated during the nine years of autocratic rule.

Speaking in the meeting Begum Khaleda Zia said all the pledges given to the people and programmes announced to the nation before the elections would be implemented in phases. The rest of the programmes would soon be undertaken, she assured.

Begum Zia asked the Council of Ministers members to be active in implementing the pledges and programmes to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the people.

Public investment

From Page 1 Col. 5

the World Bank Country Economic Mission also recommended to check wasteful expenditure so that the prioritized list of investments can enjoy broad donor support and endorsement.

Official sources said greater participation of the donors was also asked in the investment prioritization exercise.

The Bank mission stressed on institutional reforms in planning, budgeting and aid utilisation and suggested several actions.

The actions include strengthening the capacity of the Resource Committee to monitor short term economic conditions, implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on Reforms in Budgeting and Expenditure Control and a more aggressive approach to streamlining aid utilization procedures.

It expressed concern at the declining rate of public investment and increase in current expenditure over the

The Bank mission appreciated overall macroeconomic performance of the government but stressed on major policy actions in input liberalisation in agriculture, trade, tariff and financial sector reforms, and public enterprises restructuring.

The mission did not specify the volume of aid to be required by Bangladesh, but indicated that it would be larger than the previous year.

The Wrap up meeting on Wednesday decided that a sim-

From Page 1 Col. 4 petition saying that there was no such provision regarding giving permission to the accused to attend the parliament session. Moreover it would im-

pede the hearing of the case. Judge Mohammad Habibullah also imposed a restriction on Ershad's making any press statement during the hearing after prosecution witness Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Azizul Haque Bhuiyan objected to a comment made by Ershad.

Ershad had said that he knew the CMM and had given him the job in reply to a query of one of his lawyers on April 2 during the recess. The report was published in different dailies.

After completion of the cross-examination prosecution witness Azizul Haque drew the attention of the Judge to the particular report. The CMM said that he

passed the EPCS examination in 1969 and since then had been doing a government job with honesty and dedication. So the question of his being provide a job by Ershad does not arise, he added.

At this stage Judge Mohammad Habibullah asked whether there was any Reporter of the concerned

The Reporter of the concerned daily then got up.

Judge Mohammad Habibullah asked him not to misquote the court proceed ings. Otherwise, he said he would be compelled to stop publication of the proceedings. At this stage all the reporters stood up and defended the concerned reporter saying

that all of them had heard

Ershad made such a comment

and reported it accordingly. Mohammad Judge Habibullah then told the accused not to make any press statement. At this stage Ershad also withdrew his remark and begged pardon from the CMM asking him to forget

the matter and forgive him. "It will be the wisest that the accused not be allowed to make any statement," the learned Judge said after hearing the Reporters.

The Defense Lawyer Strajul Haque also said," I will advise my client not to make any comment in the court".

The warning against Defense Lawyer Kazi Shahadat Hossain came when his unbecoming behaviour Irritated the persons who were conducting the Inpunal At one stage he wanted to

cross-examine the prosecution witness CMM Azizul Haque after the CMM had been cross-examined by Advocate Strajul Haque. But the Attorney General

quoting a rule told the Judge

that more than one defense

lawyer or prosecution lawyer should not be allowed to examine the witnesses. However other lawyers can assist the conducting lawyer. Judge Mohammad Habibullah gave permission to

Kazi Shahadat, but inspite of this he started quarreling with the Attorney General Aminul Haque. Kazi Shahadat said that he was the conducting lawyer

and that he had employed Advocate Strajul Haque - a senior lawyer to assist him. The Attorney General got

furious and asked Kazi Shahadat Hossain to say whatever he liked addressing the Judge.

At this stage the Judge got angry and said." We have come a long way in civilisation. Every one should behave properly. He then asked Shahadat Hossain to sit.

However later the learned judge asked him to continue the cross- examination saying that he would take lawful action if any one violates normal procedure.

But after he asked some questions, the accused Ershad himself requested Kazi Shahadat Hossain not to proceed further with cross- examination.

Hearing of the case commenced at 10.25 am with the resumption of the cross examination of the prosecution witness the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate.

The court was adjourned last Tuesday to allow Ershad to take oath as an MP who was elected in his home district Rangpur in the February 27 parliament elections.

The cross-examination continued on the inventory prepared by a committee headed by CMM Azizul Haque Bhuiyan. The defense again adopted

the strategy that the arms which were recovered from the Sena Bhavan were not Ershad's personal belongings The defence lawyer tried to prove that the arms were kept by the deposed President's Military Secretary.

lawyer the CMM said that four

unlicensed arms were recov-

The inventory committee according to the CMM included a representative of the accused. Mustafizur Rahman who is his (Ershad's) brother-Replying to the defence

ered form the Sena Bhavan where Ershad used to live and the other four from a trunk returned by Mustafizur Rahman

on December 24. Following are excerpts of

the cross-examination: Defense Lawyer (DL): In the inventory list you have put a remark (personal) against all items except arms. Why did you not put the same against

CMM: As the inventory of arms was made subject to inquiry we did not level the arms as personal. D L: As the remark column

for arms in the inventory list

was nil, we can perceive that the goods were not disposed of as per terms of the preparation of the inventory list. CMM: We mentioned about the arms in the report pre-

sented by the committee. Judge: You kept the remark column nil to take decision later? CMM : We did not keep the

column vacant because the arms were not personal, but to come to a decision later on about the arms. D.L: The trunk that was brought by Mustafiz was said by

him to be containing personal effects? CMM: Yes Who opened the

CMM: Mustafizur Rahman himself opened the trunk.

D.L: Did you show the arms to the Military Secretary of CMM: His representative

D.L.: Who carried the gift items of the ex-President when he travelled abroad? CMM: Lt. Col. Augur

D.L: Has he certified that those are not gifts? CMM: He did not give any certificate. D.L: Has it been certified

either at the meeting or..... Attorney General: I have objection on such a query. Judge: There was no

certificate that the items were not gifts. D.L: Did you assume that they were not gifts?

CMM: We assumed. D.L: You said these are not gifts just on assumption. CMM: Not only on assu-

mption. The assumption was backed by evidence. D.L: Did you ascertain the price of the arms?

CMM: Price fixation was not in the terms of the inventory. Judge: Price is immaterial. DL: Because those were

gifts there was no fixation of

D.L: Did you inform the ex-: No. His

representative was present.

D.L.: You could have eastly inform the Ex-President at the Gulshan Sub-jail. CMM: Home Ministry did

not ask me to inform him. D.L. : Did you get any guidance or seek any guidance from the Home Ministry to

lodge a case? CMM: There is no report of guidance. D.L: You asked for guidance.

But guidance did not come. Judge: Did the Home Ministry tell you anything asking not to go for a case and that it will take measures. CMM: Prior to the

unofficial note on December 29, the Home Ministry informed us that they are going to lodge a case. D.L : Do you have a brother-

CMM: Yes. D.L.: How many pairs of shoes has he? Do you know? CMM: No.

D.L : Have

in-law?

against Ershad? CMM: No I did not recommend any prosecution. D.L: Did you try to read the Arabic writings on the arms?

recommended any prosecution

CMM: I don't know. Later the defense lawyer made a suggestion which was objected the by C.M.M. The suggestion was, "it was not true that before December 6. the President of Bangladesh receive any gift from different heads of state and diplomatic

dignitaries. The C.M.M said that he did not comply with any suggestion like this.

showed a letter of autho-

Later the Attorney General

risation by the ex-President H. M. Ershad to accept Mustafizur Rahman his brother-in-law as his representative. It may be mentioned that out of the recovered arms four were pistols and four were guns, which was stated as

One of the guns was almost like a pistol. On the other hand two of the recovered pistols were

"three guns and five pistols"

made of gold. Those were supposed to have been presented by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as stated by a Defense lawyer to the CID Police in the court when the arms were produced as exhibits.

But it was inadvertently published that the source of information was the CID in our item published on April 3 under the caption. Golden pistols shown as exhibits" in column 8 of page one.

Ershad: Press The Widnight Mic

Gorbachev donates millions to charity

MOSCOW, Apr 4: President Mikhail S. Gorbachev donated more than 1 million US Dollars and more than 1 million rubles to charity last year, the Tass news agency said Thursday. Tass, quoting figures published in the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, said the money came from book royalties and international prizes, reports AP.

Soviet warning against S Korea

SEOUL, Apr 4: A senior Soviet-official warned South Korea today that there would be "grave complications" if it joined the United Nations without North Korea, Should South Korea decide to enter the United Nations unflaterally and not with North Korea, then grave complications will arise." Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev told reporters, reports Reuter.

Max Frisch dead

ZURICH, Apr 4: Swiss author Max Frisch died in Switzerland on Wednesday night, the Swiss News Agency

quoting his son, reported today. Frisch, one of Europe's most renowned novelists and dramatists, had been ill for some time. He was 79.

JP MPs

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President H.M. Ershad to allow him to attend the JP session was turned down by the court on Thursday.

Former minister Gen (retd) Mahmudul Hasan who is also detained in jail may not be able to attend the session since no bail petition has been moved in his favour, according to sources.

Three other MPs-elect of JP former Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed and former Ministers Anwar Hossain Manju. and Sardar Amjad Hossain, are still absconding and cannot at tend the session. They are yet to take oath.

The three former ministers were asked by the administra tion to surrender but they did not oblige

Parliament session

From Page 1 Col. 8 deemed to continue to hold office until his successor has en

The House will first elect a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker. The new Speaker and the Deputy Speaker will take oath from Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed at the parliament house following which the new Speaker will take over and the outgoing Speaker depart.

are to conduct the business of the parliament in the absence of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker. An obituary resolution mourning deaths in prodemocracy movements, and demise of noted persons will be adopted. Fortyfour ordinances pro-

point a panel of chairmen who

mulgated between August 1990 and March 1991 will then be laid before the House The annual report 1990 of Bangladesh Public Service Commission will also be presented.

The business of the day will be concluded through the inaugural address in the parliament by Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.

The fifth Parliament inher Constitution became effective

Following the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, the first Parliament was formed through an election of March 7, 1973. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the

Bench. While rejecting the

From Page 1 Col. 8

Moudud

prayer for an ad-interim bail the Court issued a rule on the government as to why the adinterim bail would not be granted to the detenu.

The application was heard yesterday and the Court enlarged the former Vice President on bail.

The Court also passed an order to put the Moudud's house under security and his passport handed over as secu-

Senior Advocate M A Malek assisted by Azizul Hoque appeared for Moudud Ahmed while Deputy Attorney General Shamsul Alam assisted by Assistant Attorney General Shamsul Karim for the State.

tered upon office

The House will then ap-

History

its an oft-interrupted history that began with the inaugural session of the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh on April 10, 1972. The Constituent Assembly passed the Constitution of Bangladesh on December 15, 1972. The

the following day.

303 out of 315 seats. Shetkh Mujibur Rahman was replaced by capt. M. Mansur Ali as the Leader of the House following the introduction of one-party rule in 1975. The first Parlia ment was dissolved on Novem ber 6, 1975. It had 134 work ing days, and enacted a total of 154 laws. The second Parliament elected on February 18, 1979

Leader of the House in which

Awami League commanded

had the largest number (206) working days. Bangladesh Nationalist Party had 250 members in the 330-member House with Shah Azizur Rahman as its leader. Asaduzzaman Khan of AL was the leader of the Opposition. The second Parliament which enacted 65 laws was dissolved on March

Election of the third Parliament was boycotted by the Seven-Party Alliance, the fiveparty alliance and some smaller parties and ailiances. Jatiya Party had bagged 213 seats in the May 7, 1986 election. Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury was the Leader of the House and Sheikh Hasina was the Leader of the Opposition. The third Parliament, dissolved following a strong movement on December 6, 1987, had the lowest number of working days (75) and en-

acted 38 laws. The fourth Parliament. elected on March 3, 1988, was boycotted by all parties and alliances save Jatiya Party and its allies. Moudud Ahmed was the first Leader of the House. He was later replaced by Kazi Zafar Ahmed. A.S.M. Abdur Rab was the Leader of the Opposition. The fourth Parliament was dissolved on December 6. 1990 following the mass unsurge. The fourth Parliament had enacted a total of 142 laws

in 168 working days.

Babri Mosque

From Page 1 Col. 5 dence, leaving the minority government stranded in a Parliament dominated by opposition parties.

face on today's events, which further weakened its fragile organisation. "Hindus will not suffer any more humiliation. No force on this earth can prevent a Rama temple from being built in Ayodhya," Hindu politician Madan

The Janata Dal-S put a brave

Lal Khurana told the gathering in preliminary remarks. He was greeted with thunderous applause and wild whistling by the crowd, which a Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader, Purshottam Narain Singh, said was the biggest public meeting of Hindus since India's indepen-

dence in 1947. The entire rally site was a sea of saffron, the colour of Hinduism. A police officer said at least 300,000 people had collected for the meeting, but Singh said the figure was more and by noon would touch 2.5 million.

"We want to give the message that Hindus want a government which will let them construct a temple of their choice in Ayodhya." Singh said. He said Hindus swarming to the rally had come from all parts of India, from Christian

Majority states in the far northeast to the sparsely-populated Lakshadweep islands in the Arabian Sea. "Hindus realise that the biggest stumbling block to a

Rama temple (at the mosque site) is the government," he added, in reference to repeated government declarations that no harm would be allowed to the Muslim shrine.

Jamaat

From Page 1 Col. 8 it's needed in the prevailing

situation, he said. This support, he said, will not change the character of his party as one of the opposition parties in parliament.

The Jamaat leader alleged that the sitting arrangement in parliament was not made properly. He complained that other smaller opposition parties were given preference over Jamaat in the sitting arrangement for the inaugural

The Acting President told the Jamaat leader the sitting arrangement was purely under the jurisdiction of the Speaker and the government had no hand in it. He advised the Jamaat leader to take up the matter with the Speaker and the Secretary of Parliament.

session.

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taking any decision on the

did not make any commitment. He wanted to hand over According to a highly

transfer of power. in the meeting the names the outgoing Speaker Shamsul Huda Chowdhury said that they are efficient and they know how to run the business of par-

> the post of Speaker. ral session.

He said, in this case the

form of government. But the Acting President

power to the Speaker. However he advised both BNP and Awami League to decide on the form of government and When asked about the future Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, nominated by BNP

Awami League has also de-

ilar WB mission will again visit Dhaka before the Paris meet to review implementation of the Bank's suggestions particularly regarding public investment prioritization.