

DOWN TO EARTH

City Corporation too weak to help citizens

By Khalilur Rahman

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) now groans under a heavy debt burden. The amount of outstanding debt is nearly Tk 140 crore. DCC owes the money mainly to its contractors, WASA, Power Development Board (PDB), Titas Gas and the Telephone Department. DCC sources told The Daily Star. Of this amount, DCC paid about Taka 10 crore to the corporation contractors during the last Eid-ul-Azha.

A DCC official said that acute fund shortage has resulted in very slow progress of development and maintenance work much to the sufferings of the 70 lakh people within 110 square miles municipal area. Emergency repair work of roads remains virtually suspended. The condition of municipal markets and kutchas bazzars is extremely bad. There are 86 municipal markets spread over the city. The DCC is also in a tight spot in maintaining its 46 parks and 24 community centres due to resource constraints.

The most vital part of civic amenities that the Corporation provides to the citizens is 2231 kilometer (km) roads, 162 km footpaths and 2,430 km surface drains. All these are in an extremely bad shape. There is hardly any road in the city without potholes, craters and depressions. The movement of both vehicular traffic and pedestrians is often obstructed on the broken and uneven roads. The situation becomes more hazardous when many of the roads go under ankle to waist deep water during incessant rains. The drainage system managed by WASA (Water Supply and Sewerage) Authority is faulty. As a result rain water remains stagnant on the roads in many

parts of the city for hours. Craters and depressions on the submerged roads are not visible. Moreover there are manholes in some areas without covers. These are, indeed, death traps. Even the most cautious road user runs the risk of getting hurt due to the present state of the public thoroughfares. Repeated complaints from the affected towns people yield almost no result.

A DCC official told The Daily Star that the public complaints in respect of prevailing condition of roads, drains, markets and other utilities are so common that any staff member of relevant sections can instantly guess the nature of the problems without visiting the particular spot. We feel sorry for the people. But we have very little to do in mitigating their grievances due to fund shortages. The DCC has appealed to the government to sanction an amount of Taka 75 crore immediately for executing development work, the official added.

Another DCC source informed that many of the city roads repaired one year ago during the past administration needed immediate reconstruction. Those were broken down as low grade construction materials were used, the source alleged. During the nine-year rule of deposed President H M Ershad, money of the taxpayers was plundered in the name of city development. There was hardly any well-thought out scheme undertaken by the previous government to permanently solve the problems and to provide minimum civic facilities to the city dwellers. So far as water-logging was concerned, the DCC source continued, no tangible progress could be made

in this direction. Stagnation of rain and waste water was one of the main causes of quick damages to roads, the source pointed out. The source further stated that the city protection embankment constructed after the deluge in 1988 at a cost of 175 crore taka now required close scrutiny. The condition of most of the city roads is such that these need total reconstruction. This may require about 100 crore taka, another DCC official said.

The Daily Star correspondent Astuzaman who conducted a survey of the city roads cited an example of the DCC's incapability, among many, to repair a portion of only about 200 yards of a busy public thoroughfare during the last three years. The road which runs from Sepoybagh tempo stand via kutchas bazar to Adarshabagh at Khilgaon was severely damaged during the 1988 floods. This part of the road is the lone access for over one lakh inhabitants of Meradia and Bhutaypara localities to the main city.

Of course, during the last three years attempts were made by the DCC to repair a portion of this road but all in vain. In 1990 repair work was undertaken through floating of tender by the authorities. The work was suspended midway. The repair work is yet to be undertaken. A natural drain has gradually developed just in the middle of this road to flush out waste water from shops and households along both sides of the thoroughfare. This has caused further inconvenience to the people.

A DCC official, however, said that arrangements were being made to repair the road as early as possible.



Awami League leader Mohiuddin Ahmed addressing a party rally at Bangabandhu Avenue in the city Thursday to protest alleged attack on the life of Sheikh Hasina. —Star photo

AL calls hartal

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democracy in the country, he said. Azad also a former foreign minister regretted that the attacker even after being handed over to police was not arrested. Inaction against the attacker belonging to the ruling BNP proves the party's involvement in the incident, he commented.

The AL leader also accused the Prime Minister and BNP chief Khaleda Zia and her party for the intimidation of voters and rigging in Wednesday's by-elections by letting loose a reign of terror in the voting centres. 'Khaleda Zia, using the administrative power in her party's favour and letting BNP workers involve in terrorism had damaged neutral holding of the by-elections', Samad said adding that the acts also marred the glory of the February 27 polls.

The deputy opposition leader deplored violence in the by-elections and said that the practice would encourage the cronies of the fallen regime to stage a comeback. Visits to polling centres by the Prime Minister, ministers and MPs belonging to the ruling party were a clear violation of the party's pledge not to interfere in the by-elections, Azad said. 'The party (BNP) has no principles and ideals to stand on', he added.

'Awami League is a pro-people's party and it has a similarity in its words and deeds' and this is why the AL kept its pre-election pledges to the people by establishing parliamentary democracy in the country, Azad observed. Azad quoted the Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as saying that the BNP chief wanted her candidate in the Dhaka-9 constituency elected by hook or by crook. 'That's why she chose the path of terrorism to fulfil her desire', he remarked.

JCD activist stabbed

By DU Correspondent

A Jattiyabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activist, Saifur Islam Patu, was stabbed by a group of youths Thursday morning at the Nilkhet petrol pump.



Injured JCD worker. —Star photo

The attackers were reportedly members of the Obhi-Niru group. Saiful was taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and later released after first aid.

UNB adds: Protesting the incident, JCD organised a rally in front of the DUCSU Bhaban in the afternoon. JCD leaders accused the Chhatra League (S-A) activists for the incident and demanded immediate arrest of the culprits.

It was addressed by its Joint Convener and Dhaka University Senate member Fazlul Huq Milon, central leaders Ilias Ali and Mosharraf Ahmed Thakur.

All help assured

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The Deputy Commissioners of flood-hit districts of Thakurgaon, Nilphamari, Panchagarh and Dinajpur apprised the Prime Minister of the flood situation in their respective districts. The meeting, held at Circuit House, was attended, among others, by State Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation, Lutfor Rahman Khan, Mrs. Raushan Elahi, MP, Mrs. Khurshida Jahan Haq, MP, Acting PSO to the Supreme Commander Brigadier MSA Bhuiya and Divisional Commissioner of Rajshahi AN Habibullah.

The Prime Minister said the government had been facing one calamity after another, adding 'but we have to live with it'. She said we have to face all the challenges unitedly and boldly.

Begum Zia said test relief (TR) work would start to give succour to the flood-hit people. The Prime Minister was told that 102 unions of Dinajpur district including 13 upazilas and three pourashavas had been affected by the flood due to incessant rains and onrush of waters from the upper riparian.

About 1,71,547 families have been affected while crops on 1,72,522 acres of land have been completely destroyed. The district administration said 69,000 people had taken shelter in 48 relief centres in the district. The government also sanctioned Taka 1.5 lakh as cash relief for the district of Thakurgaon. The other relief materials include 60 tonnes of wheat, 60 tonnes of rice and 800 tonnes of wheat as test relief.

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The Midnight File

Primakov off to Saudi Arabia

CAIRO, Sept 12: Soviet envoy Yevgeny Primakov left here today for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, after a two-day visit during which he insisted that Moscow would take part in a proposed Middle East peace conference despite the political upheavals in the Soviet Union, reports AFP.

Lanka's biggest jungle war

COLOMBO, Sept 12: The entire Sri Lankan army is maintaining its biggest jungle offensive against Tamil guerrillas in the island's northeast, leaving nearly 435 people dead in 10 days of fighting, the military said today. Thousands of ground troops backed by aircraft and naval gunboats broke through defences of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the coastal district of Mullaitivu, Colonel Sarath Munasinghe said, reports AFP.

PLO rejects Israeli conditions

AMMAN, Sept 12: Yasser Arafat said in an interview published Thursday that the PLO will press for American guarantees before declaring in what form it could participate in a US-sponsored peace conference. 'We will continue to insist on our position, and we reject any Israeli preconditions... and therefore we request a memorandum of understanding from the American administration before the holding of the peace conference,' the Palestine Liberation Organization chairman told Al-Rat, a liberal daily, reports AP.

Islamic Jihad extends olive branch

BEIRUT, Sept 12: Islamic Jihad, the pro-Iranian kidnap group whose release of Briton John McCarthy broke the hostage deadlock, said today it was ready to do everything necessary to solve the crisis, reports Reuters.

1 million marooned

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The displaced persons took shelter on embankments, high places and roofs of houses. There is no arrangement to evacuate the marooned people passing their days in agony. Twenty-five of the total 35 upazilas of greater Rangpur have been badly affected by floods. Half of the Rangpur town was submerged by flood waters while other district towns were partly affected.

Railway link between Lalmonirhat and Dinajpara was restored Thursday evening but other rail and road links with Rangpur remained snapped. Five people drowned in Badarganj upazila under Nilphamari. Five deaths were reported from Kurigram while three died in Gaibandha Thursday.

Diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases broke out in different areas and three people died of these diseases in Patgram. Relief is yet to reach the affected people and no flood shelters were opened in any of the five districts till Thursday.

Floods caused colossal damage to standing crops in all these districts. The whole of Dinajpur town was inundated by floods Thursday and almost all the dwellings were affected. Railway communications from Dinajpur remained totally suspended as the railway lines in the district have gone under flood water. Road link between district headquarters and other upazilas was also snapped.

All the 13 upazilas of the district were affected by the floods that caused damage to property and standing crops. Three people drowned in the flood affected area of Birganj upazila. All the six upazilas of

Kushtia district, including the Kushtia municipal area have been affected by the floods. The situation deteriorated Thursday with the breach in the river embankments in Kumarkhali upazila which flooded eight unions affecting thousands of families.

Onrush of flood water threatened the railway bridge over the river Gorai Thursday. Engineers were trying to save the bridge that maintains railway link with Dhaka. The Iheramara-Paksey ferrisghat is also threatened by the flood. Standing crops on about 10,000 acres of land have been damaged by the flood.

Our Sirajganj correspondent adds: The death toll rose to seven and the flood situation continued to deteriorate in all nine upazilas of the district following further rise in water levels in the River Jamuna and other small rivers in the area, including the Karotoa, Gumani, lachamoti and Fulzori. The Jamuna was flowing 12cm above the danger level and standing crops on 30,000 acres have been inundated, according to district administration officials.

The Kazipara and Tarash upazilas have been severely affected and road communications with Kazipur disrupted. Our Madaripur correspondent adds: The low-lying areas of the district have been inundated due to incessant rainfall in the past seven days. The rivers Padma and Aralkha are both flowing above their danger levels. Our Manikganj correspondent adds: Floods in the district worsened further on Thursday following heavy rainfall and rise in the water levels of the rivers Padma and Jamuna. More than 65,000 people of four upazilas, Daulatpur, Ghior, Shibbalaya and Harirampur, have been affected by the onrush of flood waters.

EC worried

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The Chief Election Commissioner Justice Abdur Rouf is now monitoring the situation in the flood affected areas and trying to take necessary steps to ensure the holding of referendum in those areas. Talking to The Daily Star he said, 'I am on the list of the flood affected districts and collecting information on the situation there.' He added that the Commission was trying to find out the odds that the voters might have to face in the flood affected areas so that, he said, 'We are able to solve the problems.'

Due to the recent floods in the 22 northern districts of the country people are suffering a lot and the holding of the referendum in those areas may be difficult. When asked the Chief Election Commissioner ruled out any possibility of deferring the holding of the referendum in the flood affected districts. He said, 'There is no question of shifting the date for those affected areas.' He said that the referendum should be held throughout the country in a day.

The Chief Election Commissioner also said that all election materials have been sent to different polling centres of the country. He further informed that materials like ink, ballot papers for 'yes' and 'no' vote and counting sheets have already been supplied and that the polling officers and polling agents have also been given necessary instructions on how to collect the votes and maintain a peaceful atmosphere during holding of the referendum.

After a long discussion the historic bill was passed on the midnight of August 6, she said adding that the glorious moment of the passage of the bill was a unique event in the national history. The Prime Minister said the parliamentary system of government would be formally introduced after getting the verdict of the people in the referendum on Sunday next.

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PM: Referendum

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sovereign authority. The Prime Minister said it was the responsibility of the Jatiya Sangsad and the people's representatives to run the country in accordance with the hopes and aspirations of people.

Begum Zia reminded the people that their verdict was necessary to amend some important constitutional provisions. The system of referendum was introduced by the BNP government under leadership of President Zia, she pointed out. The Prime Minister expressed her belief that any major amendment to the Constitution might not become acceptable to the people if they were avoided while making the amendment. 'You sure have not forgotten such bitter experience in the history of constitutional amendment,' she pointed out.

She said the present Jatiya Sangsad established by the February 27 elections was held in an autocracy free atmosphere. The Prime Minister said, 'We have decided to establish parliamentary system of government instead of 16 years of presidential form of government with the consent of all in parliament to give democracy a strong footing.'

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Farakka effect

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is 60 cm above the red mark. Officials of the two districts are of the opinion that the floods have taken a devastating turn due to adverse effect of the Farakka Barrage in India.

Because of excessive withdrawal of water during the lean season from above the Farakka point, the rivers Ganges and Mahananda have been excessively silted up over the last two decades. During the lean season, the Ganges almost dries up near Chapainawabganj while the Mahananda gets a flow of only a couple of feet deep.

The irony is that the difference in water level of the Mahananda from the lean season to the rainy season is about 19 meters (about 60 feet). As the river bed has been silted up over the years, floods are continuing to get severe. In the worst affected upazilas of Shibganji, Godagari, Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj Sader, thousands of families are marooned. Damage to houses is colossal since the familiar mud walled houses of the area easily collapse when engulfed by water.

The flood protection embankment in Chapainawabganj town has been threatened as the level of water outside is three feet above the ground level in the Chapainawabganj district town. The flood protection embankment is being taken care of by using sand-bags.

Rajshahi district administration sources told The Daily Star that the Rajshahi town protection embankment may be threatened if the water level of the Ganges continues to rise at the present pace. A 12 km section of the 46 km Rajshahi-Chapainawabganj highway has gone under waist-deep water keeping road communications between the two districts disrupted for the last two days.

A total of 7421 persons have been accommodated in 33 relief shelters in Chapainawabganj district. So far, 65 metric tons of wheat, 40 tons of Gratuitous Relief (GR) rice, Taka 1.5 lakh in GR, 1000 sarces, 1000 lunghis, 600 cartons and 200 tons of life saving biscuits have been sanctioned for the flood affected people of Chapainawabganj.

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President's order rejected

BELGRADE, Sept 12: Yugoslavia's defence minister on Thursday rejected the president's order to return federal army troops to their barracks in Croatia, where the fighting reportedly killed nine more people overnight, reports AP.

UN Council okays Baltics' membership

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 12: The Security Council, acting without a vote, today recommended UN membership for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which recently declared their independence from the Soviet Union, reports Reuters.



A Khilgaon road remains unrepaired for the last three years. —Star photo

BNP secures absolute majority

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counted as polling in one centre of Chittagong was adjourned following disturbance and in the other centre of Madaripur no election took place because of floods.

During last general elections in February the turnout of voters was 85.45 per cent covering all 300 seats.

Out of 10 political parties which contested Wednesday's by-elections, only three parties, BNP, Jatiya Party and Awami League won the elections in 11 seats.

All the four seats in Dhaka city, Chittagong and Bogra vacated by Prime Minister Begum Zia were secured by the BNP nominees. The BNP won the Bholai seat vacated by Awami League leader Tofael Ahmed, Begum Zia, who won five seats, retained her Fenil seat after she vacated four seats.

The Jatiya Party showed its dominance in Rangpur district in the by-election gaining four seats vacated by the party chief, former President H M Ershad. He had won five seats in Rangpur while contesting the general elections last February from detention.

The main opposition party, Awami League was the loser in Wednesday's by-elections as it lost one seat, out of two seats vacated by the party, in Bholai and Madaripur. Another Madaripur seat which fell vacant due to the death of an Awami League member was, however, captured by the Awami League nominee.

The BNP nominee Jamiuddin Sircar who won the Dhaka-9 seat (Dhanmondi-Mohammadpur) defeating six other rivals had resigned as the State Minister for Land on August 27 following decisions taken by the party to ensure free and fair by-elections.

Among the prominent winners in the by-elections are former prime minister Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and former deputy prime minister Shah Moazzem Hossain as the Jatiya Party nominees. Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury had lost the February general elections from his home constituency in Chandpur to a BNP nominee.

Two other prominent successful candidates in the by-elections are Major (Retd) M Qamrul Islam as BNP nominee in Dhaka Five constituency (Gulshan-Cantonment) and Amir Khasru (BNP) in Chittagong-8 constituency.

Retired Major Qamrul Islam defeated six other rivals including Awami League nominee Advocate Sahara Khatun who had lost the February elections to Begum Khaleda Zia. Advocate Sahara Khatun was the lone woman candidate, out of 49 contestants in the by-elections.

Following are the results: Bogra-7: HM Hicaluzzaman Talukder Lulu (BNP)-61,071 Aminul Islam (Ind) -16,086 Madaripur-1 :Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury Liton (AL)-46,235 Motahar Hossain Siddique (BNP) -39,465

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