

DOWN TO EARTH Monsoon and municipality rule the roads

A R Sharif



The Dhaka metropolis is getting shabby again as the dry season digging of roads gains momentum. The network of metropolis roads measuring 2200 kilometers receives careless treatment from our city fathers throughout. Our roads and highways totalling to 13000 km across the country are already less than well planned, more mismanaged and neglected. In the metropolis, road 'treatment' is done alternately by the monsoon and the municipality. First, the rains wash away whatever treatment met to the roads and the rubbles left after the dry season digging; secondly, starts the so called repair and polish by Municipal contractors to set right the battered roadways. That's not all, the main part of the 'process' is the digging-sprees starting just after the repair work done at a huge cost; and this is how the story goes on about our roads repaired and then broken in the same breath. What a vicious cycle!

We can only pity the lot of our pedestrians who have to go the rugged way hopping. The younger ones might get amused over this, but the older ones have to get used to this. And once they get used to this, they should learn to go better as going gets tougher with more tensile digging. The irritant is, however, the piled up rubbish and the topless manholes overflowing with you know what.

And, of course, they have to accept risks like physical fractures from this rugged journey. In some cases, it could also be the pedestrian's eternal journey.

It is our tragedy that we have roads, highways and numerous engineers, but not good managers. Like other skills, good management requires training and professional commitment. In our country unfortunately, such skills couldn't grow yet. We are yet to see a reflection of this in our 'managers'. What grows here is the people — swelling the city population.

Rural urban migration over the last forty years on a massive scale made Dhaka the 31st largest city in the world — crossing a seven million mark, including one-and-a-half million floating. The city planners and urban sociologists are confused about what to do with slums or squatter settlements. They cannot also shelter the myth that Dhaka is a city of peasants with strong rural linkage.

The dynamics of Bangladesh society has undergone transformation resulting in employment opportunities only

in the urban sector, thus causing this huge influx in the city. Conventional wisdom may not help find a way out, but it has to stop even if gradually but surely. Gainful employment opportunities will have to be opened. In the countryside to lure them back and ease the city's burden of human concentration.

Even in city planning, we have not been prudent and realistic very often. We have made most of our traffic jams by allowing undue concentrations of supermarkets, cinema-halls, schools, colleges and business firms — all at one or around the same place. To worsen the situation, there are the rickshaws in thousands. The roads now remain nearly blocked at many points for hours due to the 'rickshaw menace'.

Whatever gains we get in terms of employment and low-cost transportation, the odd rickshaws one day will bring to a dead stop not only the four-wheelers, but the whole metropolis. And that day perhaps, is not far off. Indeed this problem has to be solved before long, and the first step should be the setting of limits.

We can't allow the whole infrastructure of urban communication to be devoured by the ever increasing rickshaws.

Let us not forget that, a nation's taste for beauty and its capacity for management is reflected in its metropolis. We owe to our city fathers some of our most beautiful roads like the Bijoy Shanti, Pantha Path and Lake Road. We may not have more and more boulevards like them to add to the metropolitan elegance but we can certainly have more and more by passes like North-South road, Tongi Diversion, and Saidabad-Rampura bypass. They are good alternatives to costly flyovers and under ground tunnels.

We must plan well to preserve our roads, protect them from diggers and keep them fit for traffic, and free from greed-corruption syndrome, most often blamed on our engineers when roads give way immaturity. Lastly we must also keep them free from air pollution and exploitation by vested quarters. Let our city fathers not remain indifferent to the need and take action before the molehill grows into a mountain.

Massacre won't stop Punjab polls: Governor

LUDHIANA (India), Dec 27: The governor of Punjab pledged Friday the massacre of 51 commuter train passengers by Sikh militants will not derail plans to hold elections in the state, reports AP.

Witnesses said 10 Sikhs stopped the train carrying workers home to their villages from Ludhiana Thursday evening and coolly raked the cars with assault rifles after letting Sikh passengers walk away.

The gunmen, wearing turbans identifying them as Sikhs, repeatedly shouted, "stop the elections, passengers said."

Balderdash

From Page 1 Col 5

country for eight hours a day on transit pass through Naaf river that separates the two neighbours.

Myanmar, amassing troops with sophisticated arms along the border, has sealed off the entry points since last Saturday, when a Myanmar attack on a Bangladesh border outpost left one BDR jawan killed and several others injured.

Myanmar's mention of AIDS, a sexually transmitted killer disease, to back a military action surprised Bangladeshi commanders.

Bangladesh is known to be almost free from AIDS, which destroys human being's immunity to diseases causing death to its victim. The first known AIDS death in Bangladesh occurred in last August and two more people are suspected to be carrying the virus.

Kashmir rebels kidnap 9

JAMMU (India), Dec 27: Kashmir militants hijacked two oil tanker-trucks and abducted the nine people riding in them on a highway reports AFP.

Cold-wave

From Page 1 Col 4

Meanwhile, the night temperature will continue to fall for the next three to four days when the mercury may fall to below seven degree Celsius, the Met office reported.

The foggy weather, according to Met office, is the residual effect of the moisture left in the air by the Westerly disturbance that caused rainfall for the last few days.

Officials in the Met office informed that fogging in the riverine areas had started last night and it would be deeper from 9 am today (Saturday). The rest of the country is expected to face similar weather in the next couple of days from today, they added.

After the present cold-spell, there will be a break following which another bitter cold-wave is expected, they said, adding the ups and downs in the temperature will continue during the entire month of January.

Burma

From Page 1 Col 4

agency activities in Arakan province in Burma.

According to an available count, some 40,000 Burmese Muslim refugees have so far taken shelter in Bangladesh.

People at the bordering villages reported hearing of fusillade of automatic gun shots and explosion of bombs inside the Burmese territory.

Yeltsin may visit India next month

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Russian President Boris Yeltsin is likely to visit India early next year, and an Indian team will visit Moscow in January to finalise preparations for the trip, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said today, reports AFP.

The news agency quoted a senior Russian diplomat here as saying the secretary level team would leave for Moscow in the first half of January and also discuss nagging issues of trade, currency exchange rate and defense cooperation.

India a long-time ally of the former Soviet Union, recognised the Russian Federation on Thursday, the same day as did neighbouring Pakistan.

PTI quoted Alexander Kadakin, who holds the rank of minister in the Russian embassy here, as welcoming India's recognition of the member nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Kadakin did not give any dates for the proposed Yeltsin trip in his interview with Indian journalists, the first press conference held by the embassy since the Soviet flag was lowered and the Russian tricolor raised.

AFP from Washington says: President George Bush said Thursday he likely would meet soon with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, and predicted future arms accords with the Commonwealth of Independent states would be easier to reach than with the former Soviet Union.

With the US economy in a slump, Bush also stressed his upcoming trip to Asia would help open the region's markets to US exports, especially Japan's. He also reiterated that a package of measures to stimulate the economy would be unveiled in late January in his state of the union message.

"It is important we stay in very, very close touch and as you know President Yeltsin and I have been in close touch, will continue to be, but I would say that a meeting before too long is important," Bush said during a White House press conference to announce the nomination of Barbara Franklin to replace outgoing Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher.

Police recover bank guard's body in Pabna

From Our Correspondent

PABNA, Dec 27: Police recovered the dead body of a security guard with head injuries Friday from a closed bank at Santhia upazila, 16 kilometers off here.

Police said Abdul Jalil Moktar, night guard of Ataulika branch of Pubali Bank, was killed on Thursday mid-night.

A giving first hand account of the incident, police said miscreants broke through the ventilator of the bank and tied the hands of Jalil with chords.

Transport strike

From Page 1 Col 8

Truck workers went into the indefinite strike on December 16 to press home their demand for appointment letters, Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samik Federation joined the strike Thursday.

At the meeting the owner-leaders placed a 7-point charter of demands, including separate service rule for the transport sector, reduction of fuel price and stoppage of illegal toll collection, meeting sources said.

Forest and Environment Minister Abdullah Al Noman, Divisional Commissioner Omor Farooq, owner-leaders Zakaria and Haji SM Shafi, workers' leaders Yakub and Siddiqur Rahman were present at the midnight meeting.

China recognizes all republics and Georgia

BEIJING, Dec 27: China today recognised Russia and the other republics of the new commonwealth of independent states, national radio reported, says Reuter.

"Foreign Minister Qian Qichen sent a telegram today to the Russian Foreign Minister and declared the Chinese government recognised the Russian federation," the radio said.

"China's ambassador to the Soviet Union becomes the ambassador to the Russian federation," it said.

Qian also sent telegrams to the foreign ministers of Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova, the radio said.

In addition, he sent a telegram of recognition to the Foreign Minister of Georgia, which has not yet joined the commonwealth.

"The Chinese government recognises the independence of these republics and will discuss the matter concerning

diplomatic relations with the republics later," the radio quoted Qian as telling the ministers.

The Foreign Ministry was not available for comment and a spokesman at the Russian embassy refused to confirm or deny the radio report.

He said such formal recognition was unnecessary for his country as it was a continuation of the former Soviet Union but the other republics might require such a move.

Beijing has adopted an extremely cautious approach to the final break-up of the Soviet Union, saying merely that it respected the will of the country's people.

China took its first step to establish direct ties with the republics this week when it sent a delegation including the minister of foreign trade and a deputy foreign minister on a tour of several of them.

China's communist ally North Korea earlier recognised the republics comprising the commonwealth of independent states as successors to the Soviet Union.

Algeria's first multi-party polls Fundamentalists win 80 pc seats in round-I

ALGIERS, Dec 27: Fundamentalists seeking an Islamic state won more than 80 per cent of the parliamentary seats decided today in Algeria's first multi-party general election, authorities said.

Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) candidates were also ahead in most remaining seats to be decided in a runoff next month for the 430-member parliament.

Interior Minister Larbi Belkheir said official provisional results for 206 seats won outright in Thursday's first round poll gave the FIS 167, or 81 per cent.

The former ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) trailed in third place with 16 seats, after the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) with 20 seats. Three independents were elected.

The two leading candidates for 180 seats will fight again in the runoff on January 16.

Belkheir said 171 FIS candidates, 158 for the FLN and 13 for the FFS would be among second round contenders.

Provisional results from 44 more seats were still awaited when Belkheir gave a news conference in Algiers.

Earlier, FIS leader Abdelkader Hachant said his party had won 150 seats out of 224 returns known so far.

The outcome of the election, delayed for six months after fighting between FIS militants and security forces, is being closely watched in the Arab world—especially by Algeria's north African neighbours worried by the flexing of fundamentalist muscle.

Diplomats following the poll forecast the FIS would emerge

as the biggest single party. Many have regarded the vote as one for or against Islamic fundamentalism.

"If Hachant is right the FIS could be heading for a landslide," one western diplomat said. "It looks as if the FLN is whistling in the wind."

The FLN ran a one-party state for nearly 30 years after independence from France in 1962.

It campaigned on a platform for continued economic and political reform and a coalition to resolve the country's foreign debt problems which have put many of its 25 million people in poverty.

The FIS has peaked at this first round. In the second there will be an appreciable difference," former Prime Minister Mouloud Hamrouche of the FLN told a news conference.

Another diplomat suggested that the FIS success could produce a backlash in the second round with voters swinging behind the FLN.

But one commentator said: "It looks like small parties like the RCD (Rally for Culture and Democracy) have been destroyed."

Three RCD candidates won enough votes to stand in the second round.

A total of 49 parties and more than 1,000 independents were competing for votes, Belkheir said just over 58 per cent of voters had turned out across the country, four times the size of France, and stretching from the Mediterranean to deep into the Sahara.

Anti-Yeltsin wind

From Page 1 Col 5

Soviet Parliament, told the Associated Press on Thursday

"It is unclear whether Yeltsin would be able to withstand the popular pressure after taking the unpopular decisions."

Kogan said he doubted Yeltsin will be able to play the role of the man who will reunite the country split up by Gorbachev. In trying to remove Gorbachev, Yeltsin has driven too many wedges into the foundation of the state."

Reuters adds: Muscovites expressed pessimism on Thursday about their future in an independent Russia after the end of the Soviet Union and the departure of President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Most people in the freezing streets of central Moscow knew what had happened, but the fact they now lived in a new state did not seem to have sunk in.

"Ordinary people have not felt it at all. The streets have not become cleaner, the shop shelves are still empty. I expect nothing from the future Russia," said Viktor Dubov, an engineer in his early forties.

Mikhail Sinyagin, a young bookseller waiting for customers at his kiosk near a metro station, was even more pessimistic.

"I do not give a damn. Nothing will change. Gorbachev should not have been allowed to resign. He has disrupted everything, he should be made to bring everything back," he said.

Some were sympathetic and found some words of praise for the leader who introduced democracy to the Soviet empire but left the economy in tatters.

"I am sorry for him. Thanks to Gorbachev the republics have a chance now to make it on their own and they ousted him," said Marina Fedotova, 32.

Yevgenia Sitroina, 37, said, "I am sad about his departure because he has done a lot."

(Related story on Page 5)

The Midnight File

Mujaheedins burn effigies of Gorbachev and Zahir Shah

ISLAMABAD, Dec 27: Rebels fired 92 rockets into the Afghan town of Herat today, killing four people and wounding 20 on the 12th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, official Kabul Radio reported. The Radio, monitored in Islamabad, said nine rockets were also fired into Kabul where seven people were wounded. A guerrilla news service said Afghan rebels burned the effigies of former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Afghanistan's ex-king Zahir Shah at a protest rally in a Pakistani border town marking the anniversary of the Soviet intervention in their country, reports Reuter.

Japan to recognize Russia

TOKYO, Dec 27: The Japanese government decided today to recognize the Russian federation following the dismantling of the Soviet Union, officials here said. The decision came at a cabinet meeting which also agreed that Japan would later recognise all other former Soviet republics, excluding Georgia, they said, reports AFP.

Israeli troops kill Palestinian

JERUSALEM, Dec 27: Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank on Friday shot a Palestinian to death and wounded three others after the masked, knife-wielding men refused an order to stop, the army said. Four other Palestinian activists were also captured during the incident in the West Bank village of Ramin, the army said, reports AP.

Italian financier held

ROME, Dec 27: Italian financier Giancarlo Parretti was arrested here today on charges of tax offences at the order of authorities in Syracuse, Sicily, police sources said here, reports AFP.

PDF, Five-party talk

From Page 1 Col 7

CPB leader Muzahidul Islam Selim while talking to this correspondent Friday night said that PDF should not have any objection to the proposal for simultaneous movement with Five-party combine. It is not against the spirit of either PDF or CPB, Selim said. The CPB leader was present in the last Thursday's PDF Five party meeting.

Samsuddoha MP, a PDF leader who heads CPB Parliamentary Party, told this correspondent that the Five-party had so far not show any interest in floating a single platform of the patriotic forces for reasons not intelligible.

They advance only to the extent of simultaneous movement and want to keep the Five-party alliance intact while we are ready to form a broader platform even at the cost of changing the already adopted name of the front — PDF."

Rashed Khan Menon MP, on the other hand, told this correspondent, that "our Five-party combine is not reluctant to form a broader platform with the components of PDF" adding "what we want to do is

Subic base

From Page 1 Col 5

US officials would not say when major units would be removed. But US sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said it would probably be accelerated after dependent schools close June 12.

In recent years the United States maintained about 40,000 troops, dependents and civilian employees at six bases in the Philippines, including Clark and Subic.

But the smaller installations were returned to Philippine control earlier this year in hopes of arranging an extension for Clark and Subic.

Together, Clark and Subic constituted the largest US military installation overseas.

Subic, a 60,000-acre (24,300-hectare) base 50 miles (80 kilometres) west of Manila, has about 5,800 troops and 4,500 dependents.

Closing of the base will cost thousands of Filipino residents their jobs. Most of the 300,000 residents of Olongapo, adjacent to Subic, rely on the base for their livelihood.

Rita Yandan, 46, a jeweller and beauty shop operator in Olongapo, wept when she heard the news.

"My family will move out of Olongapo because the eventual pullout of US forces from here in a year's time has sealed the doom of my business," she said. "For sure, we will no longer be able to afford the rent on our apartment and the business space we now occupy."

In September, the Philippine Senate rejected a proposed 10-year lease for Subic in return for \$203 million in annual aid. Mrs Aquino announced plans for a referendum to overturn the decision but later abandoned the idea after legal experts said it would be unconstitutional.

She then offered the United States a three-year withdrawal subject to negotiations, but the two sides were unable to agree on details.

The Philippines insisted that the United States honour constitutional prohibitions against nuclear weapons on Philippine soil and also provide a detailed plan for withdrawing.

The United States refuses to say whether nuclear weapons are stored at Subic, although it is widely assumed that ships calling at the port carry them in their inventory.

unite through street struggle". He also said that side by side with simultaneous movement with the PDF, Five-party would continue discussion with PDF aimed at floating a single platform.

PDF, however, in a recent circular asked its local units to try to launch movement at the regional level unitedly with those of Five-party and United Communist League (UCL).

Mamun Sarwar Dipu, a leader of Ganotantrik Chhatra Oikya, told The Daily Star yesterday that they would do every thing possible to unite the leaders of both the PDF and Five-party combine on a single platform on the basis of a common socio-economic and political programme.

Cauvery waters

From Page 1 Col 5

after an earlier attempt to set them on fire, the agency said.

The two states have been at loggerheads since this summer over sharing the waters of the Cauvery river which flows through both.

The dispute first erupted into major violence on December 13 when the Karnataka state government called a strike to protest against a New Delhi ruling that it had to let more Cauvery water flow into Tamil Nadu.

At least five people were killed then as mobs went on an anti-Tamil rampage.

On Thursday, the federal government sent 600 paramilitary troops to Karnataka after a fresh round of violence in which mobs attacked Tamil settlements and killed a woman.

The Tamil Nadu government in the state capital Madras said 19,000 Tamils had fled Karnataka to escape attacks.

In Bangalore, the Karnataka capital, the government said the Tamil Nadu figures were exaggerated. It said 300 families of Karnataka origin had fled attacks in Tamil Nadu.

Indemnity Ord

From Page 1 Col 7

rate their views in the report to be submitted to the parliament which goes into session on January 4.

Taking of expert opinion has been felt necessary to ensure that recommendations to be made by the committee properly take note of all legal aspects of the Indemnity (Repeal) Bill.

Members of the Special Parliamentary Committee are divided on the legal aspects of the bill that seeks to scrap the Indemnity Ordinance, 1975.

The bill protects the perpetrators of the August 15 killings from being put to trial. Some of the members say the bill can be passed by a simple majority in the Parliament. Others say a two-thirds majority will be required.

The Indemnity (Repeal) Bill, steered by Awami League, the second largest party with 92 seats in the 330-member House, is likely to generate heat in the forthcoming session. Mohammad Nasim has already said his party will not cooperate with the government in completion of work of the committee on campus violence and other areas if the latter does not help pass the bill.

The government has not yet said that it will oppose the bill. Some Treasury Bench members so far have only suggested that AL could go to the Supreme Court to seek a verdict on the validity of the Indemnity Ordinance.

Editor : S. M. Ali