

DOWN TO EARTH

The congested sidewalks

by A S M Nurunnabi

The problem of congested footpaths of the city is not a new one. It had been sought to be tackled by law-enforcing agencies in a phlegmatic sort of way from time to time in the past. But the result always proved to be transient.

For a city rapidly growing in population seeking means of earning a living through any possible means, the sidewalks provide an easy access to their livelihood. The problem is admittedly a difficult one. For, the number of people seeking a living on the sidewalks is always on the increase. On this account, devising a feasible rehabilitation scheme for them at alternative sites is really a Herculean task. Lately, the problem has reached such an extent that it is felt that counter measures need to be taken on an urgent basis.

The prevailing scenes along the sidewalks appear to be bizarre. As for example, let us look at the North South Road leading to the Baitul Mukarram area from there to the Gulistan area with off-shoots jutting into nearby nooks and crannies. The same situation is visible almost in the entire Motijheel Commercial Area and many other areas of the Dhaka city, more or less. The anarchical situation is worse confounded in the busy commercial area by the equally disorderly double parking of motor vehicles. This medley of confusing factors force the pedestrians out of the sidewalks on to the roads, impeding

free flow of vehicular traffic and creating possibilities of accidents.

It is understood that the City Corporation is the proper authority to deal with the burgeoning problem. The authority on its side reportedly takes the position that its shortage of requisite manpower precludes adoption of effective drive against the encroachers. The police are sometimes found mounting sporadic raids. Some people, however, make the allegation that some quarters which can play a positive part in this regard remain passive.

In view of the growing dimension of the problem, it seems urgent that the hands of the proper authority should be strengthened to deal effectively with this menace to civic life. A growing metropolitan city needs to present a clean visage of its network of roads and pavements. Apart from the more advanced countries in the west, some countries in Asia, for instance, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and even New Delhi to an extent have managed to keep their sidewalks and pavements free from encroachments from vendors, traders or beggars.

The problem has obvious humane implications. The economy-minded people who form the bulk of customers for the merchandise selling on the sidewalks merit as much consideration as those small traders and vendors engaged

in various trades on the pavements for earning a living. Since the problem involves socio-economic considerations as well, it is believed that a process of eviction, even on a sustained basis, cannot be the answer.

It is, therefore, considered important that this perspective is kept in view in framing any scheme for rehabilitation of the people to be evicted from those areas. Since the pavement congestion has already become intolerable it behoves the concerned authorities to adopt suitable scheme in this behalf on a priority basis.

On account of the severe limitation of adequate space in city areas for their rehabilitation, it is believed in some quarters that the only alternative at present is to push upward from street level or downward below ground for any rehabilitation scheme. Such projects exist in some developed Asian cities.

The City Corporation had previously set up some hawkers' markets in the city. But their efforts barely touched the fringe of the problem which has been steadily on the rise. Now the problem has assumed gargantuan proportions, which, in combination with the slow-moving rickshaws, is creating prolonged traffic jams in those areas. The current pavement situation presents just one aspect of the existing traffic anarchy.



Major Sikh parties to boycott polls

CHANDIGARH, Jan 17: Major Sikh political parties decided Friday to boycott elections that were called for next month to restore local government in Punjab state for the first time in five years.

The leaders of six parties agreed not to field candidates for the Feb. 19 vote for 117 seats in the state legislature, announced Wednesday by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's government. They dismissed the election as "a farce."

The last elected state government was dismissed in 1987 when a Sikh separatist campaign spun out of control. The northern farm state has been governed since then directly from New Delhi.

The refusal to take part in the campaign could leave the way open for Hindu-dominated parties or the dominant Congress Party to wait into office in Punjab, the only Indian state where Sikhs are in a majority. Nationwide, Sikhs are 2 per cent of India's 844 million people.

But Sikh candidates may run as independents or representing the single major Sikh party that did not attend Friday's meeting of Sikh leaders in the city of Ludhiana.

A spokesman said after the meeting that the six parties believed the vote was pointless. "Without finding a solution to the Punjab problem, participation in the election does not mean anything to the Sikhs," said Prakash Singh Badal, a former Punjab chief Minister - the state's highest elected official.

All the factions are considered close to the outlawed mil-

itant groups that have been fighting since 1983 for an independent Sikh nation in Punjab.

The Sikh parties previously demanded the release of all suspected militants being held without trial and the withdrawal of the thousands of army troops sent to Punjab to contain the insurrection and ensure public safety for the election.

The elections were supposed to be held last June but were postponed at the last minute until September. They were canceled once again by Rao's government because of the continuing violence.

More than 20 Sikh candidates were assassinated in the may-June campaign by militants who wanted to sabotage the election.

Two killed in connection with dacoity

By Staff Correspondent

Two persons were killed in connection with a dacoity at Din Mohammad Colony at Cantonment in the city Friday early hours.

Belal, a tempoo helper, son of Nawab Ali, was stabbed to death by dacoits at his residence in the colony at about 3:30 am while another unidentified person suspected to be dacoit was beaten to death by mob.

Star man

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hour-long blockade of the ghat by the transport workers, causing a serious log-jam of traffic at Kuchiamara and at Baghapur in Keraniganj upazila on the other side of the river.

There is no security at these ghats. You never see any policemen on duty at these places which have become dens of thugs and extortionists posing as transport and ghat workers. People who travel through these ghats are completely at the mercy of these mafiya who are organised and armed. Ordinary people are too afraid to protest, as there is never any police there to protect the public," Mohsin said.

Both Mohsin and the badly-injured taxi driver filed cases against the arrested man.

The Superintendent of Police (SP) of Munshiganj, Farook Ahmed Chowdhury, told Mohsin that he had only 20 policemen at his disposal to deploy in Sirajdikhan upazila.

"It is not possible for me to provide security at ferry ghats as these 20 have to patrol the entire upazila. I can only think about the ghats if the higher authorities provide me with sufficient manpower," the SP told Mohsin.

The blockade ended after the police, under pressure from the stranded public, removed all the vehicles which were left parked sideways by the angry workers on the narrow lane leading to the jetty.

1 killed, 1 hurt in train mishap

The driver of a goods train was killed and its assistant driver was injured when engine of Akhaura bound Ka-2 goods train hit detached wagons of another goods train in between Satgaon and Rashidpur stations on Sylhet-Akhaura section early Friday, according to railway source, reports BSS.

Driver Malay Mia and assistant driver Hossain Ali were on board the engine of Ka-2 goods train.

Injured Hossain Ali has been sent to Dhaka by road after giving first aid at the Srimangal Health Complex.



Visiting Thai Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn placing wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar yesterday. —PID photo

New initiative to solve CU deadlock

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 17: The Chittagong University authorities are expected to hold an official dialogue soon with the student leaders in a bid to break the stalemate that began on the campus fresh following the indefinite strike called by the APSU and the CUCSU challenging the appointments of new Vice Chancellor and pro-Vice Chancellor.

Student leaders blamed the government for violation of 1973 University Act in appointing the new Vice Chancellor for the Chittagong University. The leaders of the APSU and the CUCSU called upon the government to withdraw what they said "undemocratic" decision. The indefinite student strike called by the APSU and the CUCSU to oppose the removal of former Vice Chancellor and appointment of a new one began from the first day of New Year, affecting the academic life of about twelve thousand students of the Chittagong University in addition to turning the campus more volatile and causing more worries to all concerned, including the guardians. The government to solve the problem appointed a new Vice Chancellor to overcome the one-year-long crisis that gripped the campus. But the step sparked off bigger crises as the APSU and the CUCSU, instead of welcoming the decision, launched a fresh movement protesting the measure taken by the government. Since then, the Chittagong University entered into another deadlock with a section

of teachers resenting press statements resending the official move. Those teachers also expressed unhappiness especially over the appointment of pro-Vice Chancellor who was believed to be a pro-Jamaat supporter.

However, the fundamentalist student faction Islam Chhatra Shibir hailed the move of the government for appointing a new Vice Chancellor and a pro-Vice Chancellor. The Shibir-backed students observed a token hunger strike Thursday last on the campus, demanding the reopening of the classes and restoration of academic life.

Mentionably, from the first day of January no class was held at the Chittagong University as students could not reach the campus as the protesting APSU and CUCSU blocked the road to the university.

Meanwhile, in order to defuse the tension, the new Vice Chancellor and provosts of halls were reported to have held private-level talks with the leaders of APSU (All-Party Students Unity) and CUCSU (Chittagong University Central Students Union), aimed at breaking the stalemate, sources said. Efforts were on to bring those student leaders into the confidence of the authority through unofficial contacts so that it could pave the way for holding an official dialogue soon to make an end to the trouble in the greater interest of academic atmosphere of the Chittagong University.

Vajiralongkorn

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with Bangladesh.

Earlier, the Thai Prince was received by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia when he arrived at Sonargaon Hotel. The two held a brief meeting and exchanged pleasantries.

BSS adds: Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman called on the Thai Crown Prince at Karatota state guest house in Dhaka Friday evening.

During the meeting the Foreign Minister said there were scopes for cooperation between Bangladesh and Thailand in areas like population control, rural development and tourism.

The Prince said cottage industry and handicraft had created employment opportunity in rural areas in his country. He said there were chances of sharing experience between the two countries in both the sectors. He praised the liberal industrial policy of Bangladesh.

That Deputy Prime Minister Meechai Ruchuphan, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman and Bangladesh Ambassador to Thailand Major General Motiul Hossain were present when the Foreign Minister called on the Prince.

Ijtema

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prayers) would be offered.

About two thousand devotees from as many as 35 countries have already arrived at the venue. The countries include India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, USA, UK, Algeria, Bahrain, UAE, Sudan, Syria, Brunei, Australia, France, South Africa, the Philippines, Chad, Nigeria, Singapore, Kuwait, Qatar, Fiji, Turkey, Switzerland, Morocco, Ethiopia, Jordan and Egypt.

Ijtema organisers expected devotees from some other countries tomorrow.

Hazrat Maulana Enamul Hasan, who conducts the Akheri munajat every year, is unable to conduct this year's prayers because of ill health, according to the organisers.

Besides the separate pendals for the devotees from home and abroad, electricity, power, gas, water supply and necessary sanitation facilities have been ensured.

Tongi Pourashava and local hospital have set up temporary health care centres at different parts of the venue.

Hasina greets Biswa Ijtema attendants

Awami League president, and leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina has greeted the Muslim devotees attending the Biswa Ijtema at Tongi, reports UNB.

In a statement Friday, she expressed her solidarity with the devotees and sought blessings of Almighty Allah for fighting all sorts of exploitation, deprivation, injustice and bigotry.

Six killed in Punjab bomb blast

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: At least six people were killed and 15 more injured when a powerful bomb exploded in the northern state of Punjab today, the Press Trust of India said.



Devotees on way to Tongi for Biswa Ejtema today. — Photo: Gazipur Correspondent

The Midnight File

Gamsakhurdia supporters regrouping in Georgia

TBILISI, Jan 17: Armed supporters of Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia were gathering in western Georgia after the deposed leader returned there Thursday and announced 'the start of a civil war,' reports said. The reports, obtained in Tbilisi from the President's supporters, said the Gamsakhurdia backers were rallying in Kutaisi, a city about 100 kms (60 miles) from Zugdidi, where the President urged a crowd on Thursday to march on the Georgian capital and 'liquidate the junta' that forced him from power earlier this month, reports AFP.

Shamir likely to seek early elections

JERUSALEM, Jan 17: Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said Friday he would 'almost certainly' seek early elections to end a political crisis set off by far-right parties trying to halt Middle East peace talks. Shamir said he would try to keep the peace process on track in the next few months despite the political uncertainty, citing the progress he said was made in each round of talks, reports AP.

500 Islamic militants held in Algeria

ALGERIA, Jan 17: Five hundred Islamic fundamentalists have been arrested by security forces in Algeria, a religious leader said here today. Abdelkader Moghni, imam of the Es Curma 'De Bab El Oued Mosque,' did not however say where or when the arrests took place. Eyewitnesses saw several Islamic militants arrested near the mosque, reports AFP.

Boudiaf returns from exile

'None will be allowed to monopolise religion'

ALGERS, Jan 17: Algeria's new leader Mohamed Boudiaf returned home from exile to take power and warned Islamic fundamentalists a state of law would rule and religion must not be abused, reports Reuter.

Boudiaf addressed the nation in sombre terms within seven hours of arrival to a red-carpet welcome. 27 years after being sentenced to death for political activity.

He told Algeria's 25 million

President Chadli Benjedid resigned at the weekend. Diplomats say he was forced out by military and senior officials angered at his determination to see the general election through.

On Sunday, Algeria's interim rulers cancelled the unfinished poll. The FIS said it would pursue its goals and challenge through legal means the new five-man presidency led by Boudiaf.

"I have come to offer my hand to everyone without exception for reconciliation, cooperation to build Algeria as the martyrs of the revolution against the French dreamed and the young now dream and Algeria of fraternity, tolerance and creative work," the new head of state said.

But he added: "The institutions of state must be respected by all and the state must be one of law."



Mohamed Boudiaf. —AFP photo

Shafique Siddiqui undergoes brain operation

Prof Shafique Siddique, husband of Sheikh Rehana, was operated upon in his brain successfully at Singapore National University Hospital Friday, reports UNB.

Dr Timo Thylee, a renowned neurosurgeon, conducted the five-hour operation from 10 am, Awami League sources said.

The operation is successful, Dr Timo Thylee told anxious relatives of Prof Siddique at the hospital.

47 killed as ferry capsizes in Jhelum

LAHORE, Jan 17: A ferry jammed with passengers returning from a religious festival capsized in the icy Jhelum River and at least 47 people were killed, police said Friday, reports AP.

Another 150 people were missing and feared drowned, police said.

They said 50 people swam to shore after the boat overturned late Thursday in an isolated region of eastern Punjab Province.

Rescue operations began Friday morning, police said, and 47 bodies were found.

Police said the ferry overturned shortly after it set off from a festival in the village of Machhiwala, 150 miles (250 kilometers) south of Lahore.

The ferry had a maximum capacity of about 175 passengers.

Dhaka - CIS

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currency since 1987.

Concerned sources observe that the terms and conditions of loans from the East European countries would also be harsher for Bangladesh. The total amount of loans and aids would also be squeezed due to their internal crisis.

The sixth unit agreement with Russia also reflected this attitude. The interest rate for the sixth unit programme was four per cent while the interest rate for the fifth unit project was three per cent. The percentage of down payment has also been enhanced from the previous five per cent to 7.5 per cent.

Sources said the future of economic co-operation with the East European countries is not bright as yet. Besides Russia, some economic relations still exist with Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

CIS unity meet

From Page 1 Col 7 reported since most of the former Soviet republics freed prices on many goods earlier this month.

Several militiamen were also wounded in the riot in Tashkent Thursday night, the Russian Information Agency said. The riots occurred on the same day Uzbek authorities freed prices and introduced food coupons.

The students broke the windows of food stores displaying goods they said were now unaffordable, said Alfred Baranov, the deputy chief of the Uzbek news agency Uztag.

They also overturned several cars and threw rocks at police, the Interfax news agency reported. Students speakers demanded the resignation of Uzbekistan's president, Islam Karimov.

HBFC loan

From Page 1 Col 4 surances from the minister court cases had been suspended for a few months, but were resumed recently.

He added that the Finance Minister had also agreed to waive 50 per cent of lump sum interests and divide the rest into installments payable within the loan-term. The minister also assured to waive the total amount of penalty interests, Haque said.

However, the Finance Ministry source said that demands of the borrowers' association were being considered but added no decision had been taken in this regard.

He pointed out that all options, including turning it into a commercial bank were being considered to make HBFC financially viable again. He said as funds, need to be re-cycled to provide new loans, the borrowers need to play leading role and should repay the outstanding amounts to refurbish the funds.

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