DOWN TO EARTH

Growing Urban Noise Pollution

By A S M Nurunnabi

Dhaka city has been steadily becoming a victim of an aspect of environmental degradation: Noise pollution. The concept is comparatively new in the context of our urban development. But the newness does not seem to cover the fact that it has already posed a threat to public health. Among the several factors responsible, the more conspicuous are: lack of proper planning in urban growth, existence of noise-creating industries and enterprises in areas mostly residential and recreational in character within city limits and absence of awareness among city dwellers of the consequences stemming from constant exposure to noisy environment.

Let us survey the existing state of utter confusion prevailing in the field of environmental acoustics. For lack of proper zoning of growth activities into specific areas like residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, etc. we find an intermingling of a number of disparate entities in a given area. For example, we find in a predominantly residential area existence of mills and factories, commercial undertakings, educational institutions. A hospital or a recreational facility is found located cheek by jowl with centres of heavy vehicular traffic whose noise is compounded by uncontrolled use of mechanical horns used by cars, trucks and buses.

Our lack of civic sense in many cases is a contributing factor. When a marriage or other function or ceremony is held in any locality, its sponsors are found to indulge in long spells of playing high-pitched music or delivery of speeches on loudspeakers even after midnight hours. They do not spare a thought that the disturbance they are creating can be a source of extreme mental agony to other people living around, particularly patients, students preparing for examinations or persons rest after a hard day's work.

In a large city noise is, of course, a characteristic feature. What is deplorable is the lack of effective measures to control or decrease the level of urban noise.

The intensity of sound is measured in logarithmic units known as decibels. At a level of 80 decibels, sound is annoying; loss of hearing or physical damage to the components of the ear can be caused by steady exposure to noises in excess of 90 decibels, a level that is frequently exceeded by many common urban sounds, such as operation of drilling and welding machines, heavy construction machines, jet planes and excessively loud music. In addition to the loss of hearing, there is some evidence that noise can produce other deleterious effects on human health and work performance.

The developed countries are more conscious of the adverse effects of noise pollution. For instance, in Japan, along the long route from the Narita airport to the Tokyo city centre, stretches of noise insulation boards have been installed in places which are residential in character to protect the latter from noises arising from heavy motor traffic on the route. In many cities operation of drilling and other noise-creating equipment is legally prohibited after 5 p.m.

Not that we lack prohibitory provisions in our country. For the Dhaka city, the Metropolitan Police have made legal provisions for control of the use of loudspeakers for public meetings or other functions. Under such provisions, permission of the Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioners is necessary for use of loudspeakers for such purposes.

But the sad part of the situation is said to be that such permission is not sought in most cases and the Police are not found very particular in enforcing the law. In fact, the provisions are followed more in their violation than in their observance. In our Penal Code also, there are provisions for prevention of public nuisance which term includes nuisance on account of creation of excessive noise in any locality. Sadly enough, we do not have that degree of civic consciousness to seek the help of police to stop such nuisance under those provisions of the Penal Code. It is understood that the Department of Environment has made provisions under law for protection of environment which cover provisions against noise pollution also.

Thus it appears that, though in theory, we have legal instruments available, there are obvious sings of indifference on the part of the concerned authorities to check the growing menace. Lately the situation has reached such a stage that we hear many people grumble that we are not yet fit for existence in a civilized society. It, therefore, behoves the concerned authorities to be more alert and active in controlling the burgeoning ills of noise pollution.

Women brought out a procession on the 'International Women's Day' in the city yesterday. — Star photo

The Midnight File

Ghali calls to stop war in Nagorno-Karabakh

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 6: Secretary-General Boutros Ghali on Friday urged an immediate end to fighting between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. He called on the two former Soviet republics to settle their disputes in accordance with their UN obligations and to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On Thursday, Azerbaijan called for the United Nations to help resolve its dispute with Armenia, reports AP.

France, Germany negotiate extending fast train

PARIS, Mar 6: France and Germany tentatively agreed Friday to extend France's high-speed train to Frankfurt and Munich. The agreement is to be signed at a summit in May. France is currently studying the cost of extending the TGV, or Train de Grande Vitesse, through northeastern France to the German border. Results of the study are due in the spring. Early estimates place the cost of building the line at 25 billion francs (dlrs 4.4 billion). French Transport Minister Paul Quilès said financing could be opened to the public, reports AP.

10 killed as bus, train collide in Sindh

ISLAMABAD, Mar 6: A passenger bus and a wagon collided in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh killing at least 10 people, the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) reported. Several people were also injured in the accident, which occurred near the town of Sukkur when the wagon driver, overtaking a truck, ran into a bus traveling in the opposite direction, reports AFP.

Strike paralyses Lebanon

BEIRUT, Mar 6: A one-day general strike paralysed Lebanon today as worker protested against price rises and an economic crisis which have given peace a bitter aftertaste, reports Reuter.

Shops, Schools, Banks and Businesses were closed across the country in response to a call by the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers, the country's largest Trade Union Alliance.

Airport employees stopped work for two hours and newspapers said they would not publish tomorrow (Saturday).

Only hospitals and pharmacies were open. Traffic was light in Beirut as residents stayed home.

The Government, in an extraordinary session that ended early today, set up a seven-member emergency committee to tackle the economic crisis, the worst since civil war ended in 1990.

"The situation is really bad. We live in fear," said Mahmoud Ghalayineh, a 33-year-old plumber. "We are afraid that one day soon we will not be able to afford to feed our children."

"I tell the government: You gave us peace, now give us our bread," he said.

By unofficial estimates, the prices of most commodities have soared between 30 to 50 per cent in the two weeks since the Lebanese Pound plunged on Beirut's Exchange Market.

Merchants have increased the prices of imported goods to compensate for the fall in the pound, which has lost about 25 per cent of its international value since February 24.

The Government this week increased Bread prices by 32.5 per cent Petrol by 28 per cent and Medicines by up to 212 per cent.

Ramzan

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ing places, including those at motor launches, streamers and launch ghats, will remain closed during the fasting hours every day in the month, according to a government decision.

The hotels and restaurants will remain open as usual after the sunset and their employees and workers will regularly get the salaries and allowances for the month of Ramzan.

The government has sought cooperation of the owners, workers and employees of hotels and restaurants in this regard.

Different socio-cultural organisations and political parties issued statements hailing the advent of the holy month and calling for preserving the sanctity of the month.

BSS adds : President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday called upon the people for leading the nation toward progress in attaining national prosperity through establishing greater unity by forgetting all differences.

He said the spirit of sacrifice, forgiveness, restraint and self-purification of Ramzan would inspire us to tolerance and establish brotherhood. In a message on the eve of the holy Ramzan, President Biswas said all have to be imbued with the earnest efforts of the welfare and serving the hungry, patients and the distressed people which is the real lesson of the holy Ramzan.

He said the Holy Quran was descended in this month with the message of freedom of humanity. Terming the month as a month of prosperity, President Biswas said it had come to us with the prospect for both the world.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said here yesterday that the spirit of holy Ramzan could be upheld by expressing solidarity with the distressed and helpless humanity in the society.

In a message on the eve of the holy Ramzan, Begum Zia said "it is our duty to put in our allout strength for the national progress and prosperity imbued with the spirit of newly established democracy sinking all our differences. The holy Ramzan teaches and inspires us to remain steadfast in attaining this target."

Begum Zid said it is a month of restrain. It is a month of mercy, abundance and excellence. The month is for prayer and self-purification which teaches for peace, tolerance and sympathy.

Kamal

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ganisation, he informed this correspondent in a telephonic interview.

Neither is it contrary to the party constitution, Hossain insisted.

After a two-hour debate, the Presidium meeting of AL concluded with the leaders requesting Kamal to reconsider his decision and the latter appealing to the colleagues not to bar him from enjoying his fundamental rights.

UNB adds: The letter of suspension to Mostafa Mohsin Mantu, General Secretary of Dhaka District Awami League, will be mailed today.

Mantu was suspended for activities detrimental to the organisation and asked to explain within 15 days from receipt of the letter why he would not be expelled from the party.

AL observes

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party office at 6 am today.

The party leaders will garland the portrait of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Meanwhile, UNB says : Sheikh Hasina in a message Friday called upon the people to forge a greater unity of democratic forces, imbued with the spirit of 1971 liberation war, to fight to consolidate independence, democracy and rule of law.

She said "anti-liberation, communal forces have raised their heads again ... anti-independence element was installed in the highest post and a move is on to grant citizenship to hated killer Golam Azam".

Hasina alleged that on one hand "rule of caprice" had been established instead of democracy and on the other "black" indemnity Ordinance still kept in force.

Recalling the eventful days in 1971, the Awami League chief said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave a clarion call from the historic Race Course maidan (now Suhrawardy Uddyan) to the nation to be prepared for the war saying "the struggle this time is for freedom, for independence."

Through his call, Sheikh Mujib outlined the armed struggle and directed the Bengali nation to face the Pakistani army for achieving the independence, she said adding people fought the war and achieved independence following the historic speech of the 7th March.

BJP leader for Israeli help to fight Kashmiris

NEW DELHI, Mar 6: An Indian MP Thursday urged the government to undertake hot pursuit of Kashmiri guerillas who crossed into Pakistan and use Israeli help to destroy" Terrorist Training Camps" there, reports AFP.

Pramod Mahajan of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP or Indian People's Party) told parliament that security forcers should be given the option to chase the militants into Pakistani-held Kashmir.

He charged that Pakistan was" continuing with its conspiracy of attempting to destabilise India" by supporting Muslim militants seeking to secede Kashmir, and" this had to be dealt with militarily."

Mahajan, whose party is the main opposition in parliament and is vigorously anti-Pakistan, asked India to utilise" Israeli expertise" to destroy the sanctuaries of Indian militants in Pakistan.

India and Israel established diplomatic links in January. Earlier, Defence Minister Sharad Pawar told parliament that Indian security forces had killed 788 militants since January 1990 on the border which divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

Another report says, Indian troopers raided a hospital Srinagar to flush out Muslim militants believed to be hiding to the complex, a paramilitary Border Security Force (BSF) spokesman said today.

BSF Deputy Inspector-General Ashok Kumar said the troopers today were searching for Muslim militants campaigning for Kashmir's secession from India for the second straight day in the 500-bed Srinagar hospital.

Ghali

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the 17 townships (sub-divisions) in the Arakan province, they said.

The troops abducted 35 Rohingya youths from village Baragazirbil in Mongdu sub-division, on Tuesday and they were feared killed.

About 5,000 refugees have streamed today into the frontier district of Cox's Bazar, crossing the Naf river that divides Bangladesh and Myanmar, the local administration reported. An estimated 1.07 lakh Myanmar Muslims have crossed the border to escape atrocities and persecution by the military authorities. Unofficial figure is more than 1.5 lakh.

Meanwhile World Food Programme (WFP) today assured full support to the Bangladesh government now tackling the crisis arising out of the influx of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh from Myanmar, it was learnt from Bangladesh embassy in Rome.

Assurance of the UN body in Rome was conveyed to the Bangladesh ambassador in Italy Waliur Rahman when he met the Executive Director of the WFP and other officials of the UN agencies in Rome.

Rome-based food agency has already announced five and a half thousand metric tons of food aid for the Rohingya refugees.

Dissident

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people, known as Rakhines, have taken shelter in Bangladesh and more than 100,000 in Thailand.

The dissident leader, frequently down with malaria, said without giving details that they would soon start activities on Myanmar's western border as ethnic Karens were doing in the east.

Mra Raza, who was an school teacher before and would later like to pursue a career of writer later, added: "fear does not touch me, even though I am the only child of my parents now under house arrest. Women around the world are fighting for their rights."

"I appeal to women across the world to join us in prayers for democracy and release of Aung San Suu Kyi on March 8, the international women's day," she said.

Row over women ends in market looting

NARSINGDI, Mar 6 : A market near Seba Sangha of the town was looted Friday, allegedly by a group of masked hoodlums, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the group of 20 to 25 armed youths blasted several handbombs in the market and looted property worth more than Tk 4 lakh.

Four people who received injury during the attack were admitted to the Sadar Hospital.

Police said today's attack was a sequel to an earlier incident between two groups of the area, involving women.

A case was lodged with police in this connection but none was arrested.

Dhaka faces

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said that the main problem at present was that it was difficult to ascertain the number of refugees that might arrive in the near future.

He said that there was a prediction that the number might reach half a million. "But I hope that the prediction does'nt come true," Anvar hastened to add.

He pointed out that 'a major danger' the authorities might face in future was that the total relief operations would be "overwhelmed" if the present rate of influx continued unabated. "This situation is unacceptable."

Earlier, Anvar inaugurated the Cox's Bazar office of the UNHCR. During his visit to Dachuapalang camp today, Anvar felt the need for reorganising the camp sites to provide better accommodation facilities to the Rohingya refugees.

Meanwhile, two officials of the London-based Amnesty International today began interviewing the Myanmar refugees. They arrived in the country Thursday and will stay in Cox's Bazar for two weeks.

Stop exodus

In our yesterday's issue, a news item headlined 'Stop exodus, UNHCR to Myanmar' was published on the front page. The call, according to the item, was given by HRC (Human Rights Commission) not UNHCR. We regret the error in the headline.

Goods on goods train knocks overbridge

SYLHET, Mar 6: Eight people were injured at Maizgaon station today as a railway foot overbridge collapsed after oversize materials carried by a goods train hit its pillars, reports UNB.

The accident occurred at about 8.30 am when Sylhet-bound Chatak Bazar Up goods train from Kulaura was entering the Maizgaon station, a Railway press release said.

A boggy of Kushiara Express and an engine of another goods train, standing at the station were also damaged when the broken bridge fell on them.

The injured were admitted to Fenchuganj Hospital and were later transferred to Sylhet Medical College Hospital in a special railway rest wagon.

A relief train has been sent to Maizgaon station. Train services, however, was not disrupted, the press release said.

Hasina blasts Govt for ineptitude

Killers roaming around despite laws for trial

NETROKONA, Mar 6: Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina today blasted Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, saying her one-year-old government had failed to run the state affairs because of its ineptitude and mismanagement, reports UNB.

"Although BNP was propelled to power by people's mandate, it had proved to be inefficient to rule the country due to lack of skills and proper planning," she told a rally organised by the district Awami League at the local Shaheed Minar premises.

Hasina, the President of Awami League, accused the BNP government of politicising the administration and creating anarchy in the country.

Hasina said the country has laws for trial of the killers but it is very unfortunate that the killers are scot free even years after the killing.

The Awami League chief said Zia had blocked the trial by enacting law and rewarded the self-proclaimed killers of Sheikh Mujib by giving them jobs in foreign missions.

The Leader of the Opposition in Parliament said her party had introduced bills for repealing the Indemnity Ordinance and independence of the judiciary in line with its election commitment for establishing rule of law in the country.

"We want to end the politics of killings and coups..... they didn't kill my father only, they killed every member of my family and four national leaders," she added.

She called upon the party workers and the people to build up a movement across the country for scrapping the Indemnity Ordinance to establish rule of law.

In an oblique reference to the Prime Minister, she criticised Begum Zia for touring by helicopter at the cost of huge money "for just digging some earth." She called upon the people to enquire about the utility of such opening of the 'so-called' canal digging programme.

Refuting BNP's contention that there would be no democracy if BNP was not in power, Hasina said, "We earned democracy through bloodshed and we will preserve it and give it an institutional shape."

Criticising the government for failing to contain the price-hike of essentials, she said the skyrocketing prices would add to the sufferings of common-man, particularly during the month of holy Ramzan.

Hasina said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had banned liquor and gambling, but the government of late President Ziaur Rahman had issued licences to 160 liquor traders. "We proposed a bill on banning wine and gabbling but, the ruling BNP that often talks of religion reacted it."

JCD attack on Sirajganj market leaves 10 hurt

SIRAJGANJ, Mar 6: At least 10 people were injured and six shops damaged as youngsters stormed a market in Chandaikuna of Raiganj upazila here today, reports UNB.

The youths, reportedly activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), attacked the market following a rumour that Vice President of Hajee Wahed Mariam Degree College students union Ainul Huq was killed.

Huq, injured along with 24 others in a clash between activists of JCD and pro-Awami League Chhatra League in the college premises on Friday, was under treatment at Mohammad Ali Hospital in Bogra.

Authorities closed the college for an indefinite period to avert further untoward incidents.

A tense situation was prevailing in the area. A heavy contingent of police was deployed in the market.

DU

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Some JCD leaders were seen asking the angry fellow activists not to open fire, the witnessed mentioned. Earlier the Montu backed BCL activists, along with some JCD activists, had gone to the TSC area brandishing fire arms.

Sources said that BCL leaders hailing from Gopalganj and Barisal districts known as the 'First World' and 'Second World' respectively were not seen in the Madhu's canteen, TSC and Arts faculty areas yesterday.

Meanwhile, the Montu group, mainly the activists of the BCL who had been expelled from the organisation after the Badal murder, took shelter in the Shahidullah and Surja Sen halls — the strongholds of BNP-backed the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) — last Thursday.

However, no injury has been reported so far.

A huge contingent of police were seen patrolling the Dhaka University campus last night.

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