

DOWN TO EARTH

A Lacklustre Picture of City's Public Transports

By ASM Nurunnabi

Every modern city has a public transport system which bears the brunt of the transport needs of its citizens. Such system may be good, indifferent or bad. In the opinion of the city's transport users, Dhaka's system is an absolutely bad one. The city's population is burgeoning at a steady pace, but its transport system is rated to have failed completely in meeting the challenge.

For the Dhaka city with a present population of nearly seven million, the total number of private buses (big size), as learnt from transport owners association, is about 125, whereas the number of mini buses is about 800. According to the same source, the total number of big and mini buses operating in the suburbs from their bases in the city is about 800 and 1500 respectively. The total fleet strength in the private sector for the whole country is reported to be nearly 19000. The BRTC is understood to have about 100 buses operating on the city routes.

What is most deplorable about the whole system is the lack of proper management and maintenance. It is true that the number of transports plying on different routes is hopelessly inadequate compared to the needs of the citizens. Its present standard of service is, however, so poor as bordering on chaos.

Let us first look at the physical condition of the buses operating. By and large, they are of the vintage class-reconditioned ones. Whatever shine they initially had, wore off

quickly on account of excessive wear and tear and lack of proper maintenance and care. Their present ramshackle look would have fitted them more for the scrap heap, but our automobile mechanics have such ingenuity in cannibalizing that these rundown vehicles manage to serve on the roads, notwithstanding the attendant hazards.

The interiors present no better spectacles. Now a few words about the passenger service offered by these vehicles. The conductors have a propensity for picking up and dropping passengers at odd spots. Even if a vehicle is packed to capacity, there will be no let up in the cries of these conductors inviting more passengers.

There are specific bus stands with zebra crossings for pedestrians, quite away from the busy road junctions. Yet it has been observed that the public buses in many cases do not stop at those bus stands, but prefer the crowded spots very near the road junctions, thereby adding to the risks of avoidable road accidents, and to the intensification of traffic jams.

Some specific instances may be cited of this hazardous practice. Although there is a bus stand near the Shishu Park well away from the busy cross roads opposite the PG Hospital, the public buses have made it a practice of stopping near the gate of the Diabetic Hospital, where there is always a heavy congestion of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The same scenes may be seen at

the Topkhana Road crossing across North-South Road, the road crossings at Nilkhet-Mirpur Road near the New Market and also near Road No 2 of Dhanmondi Residential Area.

It is felt that if the traffic police are firm in dealing with these irregularities and compel the public buses to use the specific bus stands provided for them, the problem of traffic jams at busy crossroads may be substantially eased and the dangers of accidents considerably reduced.

When asked why there is so much indifference in the proper maintenance of the interior and exterior of their vehicles, some owners of private buses said that the cost involved is so prohibitive that it is beyond their financial capacity. According to some observers, this plea does not hold good.

Knowledgeable sources believe that no improvement in the operation of public transports can be expected unless the Road Transport Authority play a more active role in ensuring that prescribed standards for fitness of a vehicle in all its aspects are rigidly followed before it is put on the road. The Police administration has a concomitant obligation through periodic check-ups to see that any vehicle operating without the requisite fitness is ordered off the road under a stiff penalty. In this way, observers think, it may be possible to stop gradual deterioration in the multidimensional aspects of the city's public transport system.



Five-party processionists chanting demand for Golam Azam's trial in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Controversy over Azam's trial deliberate: Kamal

Awami League presidium member Dr Kamal Hossain said here yesterday that those who opposed the Liberation War and collaborated with the Pakistani army must be tried in the interest of establishing the rule of law in society, reports BSS.

He asked why the trial of the collaborators of the War of Liberation was being made a controversial issue? The man who worked against humanity was a criminal in the eye of law, Dr Hossain noted.

The Awami League leader was speaking at a discussion meeting in observance of the 72th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, organised by Dakkhin Bangla Juba Kalyan Samity, the meeting presided over by Mohiuddin Ahmed MP, was addressed, among others, by M A Haq, a former minister and Barrister Amirul Islam.

Dr Kamal Hossain said a controversy was being deliberately created on trial of Golam Azam to deprive the people of their legitimate rights. There could be no denial of his (Golam Azam's) role during the War of Liberation, Dr Hossain said, adding giving shelter to such people was also an offence under law.

Dr Kamal Hossain urged the people particularly the students and youths to be imbued

with the great teachings of Bangabandhu to realise people's rights and establish Bangladesh as a self-respecting and prosperous nation. He said Bangabandhu had proved that if people were united on the basis of an ideology they could perform apparently unbelievable things like snatching independence from the yoke of powerful Pakistan army.

Dwelling on the present state of affairs, Dr Kamal Hossain said the nation could not prosper and the rights of the people could not be established without removing terrorism and eradicating corruption which were destroying the social fabric. The AL Presidium member at the same time urged all to rise above narrow interest and form broader unity for the wellbeing of majority of the population.

M A Haque said Bangabandhu was a man of varied qualities and described him as one of the greatest leaders of the Twentieth Century.

In his presidential address Mohiuddin Ahmed said Bangabandhu was a man of courage and conviction and had psychological readiness to make supreme sacrifices for the implementation of any decision.

Police, Shibir, trial body clash : 24 hurt

MANIKGANJ, Mar 20 : At least 24 people, including four policemen were injured in a triangular clash between police, Jamaat-Shibir activists and the supporters of 'Ekatturer Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee' in the town Friday, reports UNB.

Two of the injured were said to be in critical condition. Of them, Jamaat leader Saimuddin was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital while police constable Mozaffar Hossain was admitted at the Manikganj Sadar Hospital.

Witnesses said different political parties and other social organisations under the banner of Ekatturer Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee brought out a procession demanding public trial of Jamaat leader Golam Azam and protesting Tuesday's killing of student leader Yasser Arafat Pitu at Rajshahi University.

The peaceful procession, the witnesses said, came under attack by the activists of Jamaat and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir when it reached near Shahid Titumir

Academy at Dashara around 12 noon.

Police had to intervene and resort to lathi charge to disperse the combatants during chase and counter-chase between the rival activists.

Later, the Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee leader at a press conference and the Jamaat in a press statement blamed each other for the incident and demanded punishment to those responsible.

Police patrol has been intensified in the town as tension was prevailing. Meanwhile, JSD (Inu) central committee member Iqbal Hossain Khan was arrested in Manikganj Friday.

Khan, also the General Secretary of JSD Manikganj district committee, was picked up by police from an Iftar party at the District Awami League office Friday evening.

A JSD (Inu) press release said Khan was arrested in connection with a "false" case filed by Jamaat-Shibir after a clash in the town at noon Friday.

Pak-NZ

From Page 1 Col 8 Africa in the final in Melbourne next Wednesday.

England play South Africa in the second semi at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday.

Kiwi captain Martin Crowe said he was confident the New Zealanders would not crumble under the pressure of expectation from their home fans.

"We want to go out and enjoy the day and just let those natural instincts flow like they have been for the last month," Crowe said.

Pakistan captain Imran Khan said his team had become immune to pressure after having to win its final three first-round games to qualify.

"It feels a little strange now, since we've been hanging on for dear life for most of the World Cup really, and suddenly we're in the semifinals," he said.

This is probably the least amount of pressure we've felt throughout the tournament," Imran said Pakistan expected to field an unchanged team. (Details on Sports pages)

Special squad for security of 'public trial' organisers

By Staff Correspondent "Mritunjoi" a special squad to ensure security to the organisers of the planned public trial of Golam Azam was formed Friday with Lt Col (Retd) Kazi Nuruzzaman as its Adviser.

An emergency meeting of the freedom fighters students and youth command at the Topkhana road office of the Committee for Elimination of the Killers and Collaborators of 1971 War of Independence formed the special group assigned to protect the security to the top organisers and ensure smooth trial on March 26 at the Suhrawardy Uddyan.

An organiser of the National Coordination Committee for Implementation of the Spirit of the Liberation War and Annihilation of the Killers and Collaborators said that the squad members were ready even to lay their lives for the cause of the security to the leaders.

AL, 5-party

From Page 1 Col 8 the country's Independence, the Collaborators' Annihilation Committee urged all the democratic political parties of the country to come forward and sought their active cooperation to make the public trial of Golam Azam a success.

According to sources, AL leaders present at the meeting felt it necessary to incorporate the issue of trying the killers of Mujib into the Committee's agenda to effectively warm up the AL activists.

The leaders of both the Five-party and PDF are learnt to have urged the AL leaders not to intermingle the two different issues for the sake of ensuring success of the public trial. They, however, expressed their deep feeling for the necessity of trying the killers of Mujib.

When contacted, a PDF leader told this correspondent last night that if, necessary, would again meet the AL leaders to reach a consensus on a 'concrete role' of the parties on the Golam Azam issue.

Meanwhile, the Gonatantrik Chhatra Oikya (GCO), a body of nine left-leaning student organisations, has urged the three left-leaning opposition political alliances to come forward with active support to make the 'public trial' of Golam Azam a success.

The leaders of GCO and the leaders of Five-party and PDF yesterday afternoon met at the Topkhana Office of the National Awami Party (NAP). They will meet the Gonatantrik Biplobi Jote leaders, the rest of the left-leaning alliances, today to discuss the issue.

A leader of GCO told The Daily Star last night that they were hopeful of convincing all the democratic political parties of the country for providing their active support in making the public trial of Golam Azam a success.

Islamic public trial

From Page 1 Col 8

Workers' Party leader Rashed Khan Menon, MP, and Sammitia Sangskritik Jote Convenor Faiz Ahmed were among those who addressed the rally presided over by Convenor of the Chittagong unit of the committee Mustari Shaif.

Our Staff Correspondent adds: A total of 664 businessmen in a statement Friday demanded the government of arresting those who would create anarchy and protested against those who were engaged in a conspiracy to take laws in their hands "in the name of so called public trial".

The organisers of the public trial were leading the nation to a civil war, said that statement.

The signatories to the statement include FBCCI Director Anwar Kamal, Mohsin Jute Mills Chairman Syed Mohsin Ali, Sunshine Cables Director Fazlul Karim Chowdhury, BARDS Bangladesh Managing Director Mahmudur Rahman, Adviser to the Bangladesh Paints and Dyes and Chemical Merchant Association Abdus Salam, DCCI Director Nasruddin Khan and Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited Director Muhammad Yumus.

45 hurt as rival groups clash in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Mar 20 : At least 45 people were injured, 8 of them seriously, in a clash between two rival groups of people at village Khaga of sadar upazila of the district early this morning, reports UNB.

Eye witnesses said today's clash was a sequel to a hot exchange of words that took place last night between Mazem Ali, a supporter of ex-chairman Siddique and Zel Haq, a supporter of newly elected chairman Mujibur Rahman over last UP election.

The Midnight File

Iraq agrees to destroy Scud missile equipment

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 20: Iraq has agreed to destroy Scud missile-related equipment, thereby defusing a showdown with the Security Council, the United Nations said today. Baghdad's authorities had refused to scrap the equipment late last month, drawing a council warning of "serious consequences" if it did not comply, reports Reuters.

CIS ratifies debt repayment plan, postpones military issue

KIEV, Mar 20: Commonwealth leaders on Friday ratified a foreign debt repayment plan and discussed a joint peacekeeping force but postponed the most pressing economic and military issues. "The people are now demanding to know what we have done," Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk said in the gloomy keynote speech of the fourth summit of the struggling Commonwealth of Independent States. "Not one major military question has been resolved within the framework of the commonwealth," reports AP.

MCCI demands govt employees be taxed

Star report

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) has demanded imposition of income tax on the salaries drawn by the employees of government, autonomous bodies and sector corporations.

The demand same in its tax proposal for the coming financial year.

The MCCI in its proposal to the National Board of Revenue (NBR) also sought abolition of excise duty on water and tax reduction on glass, battery, television and radio cassette assembling, electric bulb, cigarette and lead oxide manufacturing industries.

MCCI viewed that there was no rational in exempting the public sector employees while the employees in the private sector were fully taxed.

It argued that with the introduction of the new pay scale for public sector employees their salaries have gone up compared with those of the private sector employees.

The MCCI viewed that the 15 per cent excise duty on water is an additional burden and hence it should be abolished.

It also urged the NBR to remove the anomalies in duty structure on the import of

sodium nitrate used in glass and fertiliser industries.

The MCCI said that local manufacturers of lead oxide were charged a higher amount in taxes than the importers of the same. It suggested that the local manufacturers be protected by restructuring the existing taxation system.

Similarly, the Chamber said that import duty on battery plates should be realistically raised so that the local manufacturers were protected against imported plates.

The MCCI suggested that to make televisions and audio cassettes cheaper, duty and tax on components of these items should be rationalised and supplementary duty at manufacturer-level should be withdrawn.

The MCCI also suggested imposing a uniform rate of 50 per cent in duty on all items used as raw materials for electric bulbs.

The Chamber also viewed that duty on some raw materials for cigarette industries was too high and suggested a reduction. It said supporting the cigarette industry would in turn contribute to the revenue earning.

JP demonstrates in Washington

By Staff Correspondent

The supporters of Jatiya Party in Washington Thursday demonstrated in front of the South Plaza of the White House demanding immediate release of former president Hussain Mohammad Ershad, a JP press release issued in Dhaka said Friday.

The demonstrators raised various slogans as the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia arrived there with the members of the entourage.

The demonstrators expressed their grievance at the deterioration of law and order situation in the country and demanded resignation of the BNP government.

Dhaka unhappy

From Page 1 Col 5

For change in the standard of living of the people," Begum Zia said.

She was speaking to the Bangladesh-United States Business Council, an organization that promotes awareness of the potential for investment in Bangladesh. The audience included members of the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, the US government and the overseas private investment corporation.

Begum Zia said that her country is rich in manpower, and now must achieve the investment and technological know-how that will enable the people of Bangladesh to exploit naturally abundant resources such as oil, coal, gas, and limestone.

She said Bangladesh had made tremendous strides in its textile industry, noting that it is "an area in which we can compete with anyone in the world."

Begum Zia added, however, that Bangladesh is unhappy with US textile quotas. If they were relaxed, she said, Bangladesh could export more cotton goods and clothing to the United States.

The Prime Minister said that Bangladesh also wants to develop exports in another industry — frozen fish. She noted that while Bangladesh presently has very limited exports, she believes this business has great potential for exploiting yet another of Bangladesh's natural resources.

She invited US companies, which are already importing goods from Bangladesh, to open plants in her country. The business, she noted, would be good for both countries.

Fire at tobacco godown

By Staff Correspondent

At least 14 people, including three firemen, became indisposed as fire broke out in a tobacco godown in the Tejgaon industrial area in the city last night.

Tejgaon police said fire engulfed the godown of Asian Tobacco Company at about 9.15 pm.

Suffocating fumes of burnt tobacco left 14 persons sick. All of them were given first aid at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

UN official

From Page 1 Col 7

cas to enable them to see for themselves the situation.

"We will be inviting UN Under Secretary General Jan Eliasson to ascertain for himself the actual situation," the Myanmar Foreign Minister said.

This is for the first time that Myanmar has spoken of taking the diplomats to border areas and also agreed to the visit by the high ranking UN official to Myanmar on the refugee issue.

So far, Myanmar chose to ignore the issue and appeals by international quarters to pay heed to the refugee problem.

Gulf returnees

From Page 1 Col 4

Mintster said "We have already communicated to the UN agency the number of Bangladeshis repatriated from Kuwait and Iraq and the amount of money required as compensation". But, the Minister added that the compensation would be available only when Saddam Hossain agrees to pay.

UN sources say Saddam Hossain has linked the right of extracting oil to the payment of compensation. The UN is yet to consider the condition, sources added.

WASA

From Page 1 Col 7

couple of days. "I am fasting and it is impossible to bring water from a distant place after day-long fasting," Masud Hassan, a resident of Motijheel area told the Daily Star.

Another sufferer of Gopbag area said that water flow sharply decreased at his residence causing difficulty in the household works for the last few days.

The long queue of water pots in a particular water tap is now a regular phenomena in the old city areas, he added.



Bush-Khaleda talks

From Page 1 Col 4 Bush recognised Bangladesh's commitment to democracy and the financial constraints it faced. He said the United States would try to find areas to be helpful as possible, in this context, he referred to some of the special areas that had been raised during the exclusive meeting, and said US would certainly look into those matters.

The two leaders, during the formal talks, exchanged views covering matters of bilateral, internal, regional and international issues. They also discussed matters pertaining to the Middle East situation and development in former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The spokesman said the meeting was held in an extremely warm and cordial atmosphere.

The Prime Minister highlighted steps that had been taken for restoring and consolidating democracy in Bangladesh. She mentioned many of the positive steps taken in this regard including freedom of the press, restoration of independence of the judiciary and more accountable and transparent government.

She stressed that the country must address economic and social problems confronting the people if democracy was to take root and grow strong. She sought US support

and cooperation in this regard. The Prime Minister listed the steps taken by her government in different sectors like trade, commerce, industry, education, food production, privatisation, population control to improve the quality of life of the people of Bangladesh.

Referring to President Bush's initiative to support programmes relating to environment in Asia, Begum Zia welcomed the priority undertaken in this regard.

She highlighted environment in Bangladesh in the context of dramatic changes in global warming. She underscored the need for appropriate technology for disaster preparedness and prevention of environmental degradation.

President Bush said there were several important programmes in the field of environment in the United States which could be of great benefit to Bangladesh. He assured his country's support to Bangladesh in this regard.

Begum Zia expressed Bangladesh's admiration for President Bush's role in the US for promotion of democracy, peace, stability and cooperation.

She referred to his special contribution towards the spectacular breakthrough in the field of disarmament and support for democracy around the

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PDF public meet today

By Staff Correspondent

Patriotic Democratic Front (PDF) will hold a public meeting today (Saturday) at 4 pm at the Purana Paltan crossing.