

# DOWN TO EARTH



## Rickshaw Anarchy On City Roads

By A S M Nurunnabi

Traffic anarchy in Dhaka city appears to have reached a horrendous state to which the vast multitude of operating rickshaws contribute their share in a large measure. With their mammoth numbers and turtle's pace, they have succeeded in making a mockery of all road traffic disciplines. The situation has become so desperate that widespread pessimism prevails and nobody has the slightest idea when there will be light at the end of the tunnel.

At any important traffic crossroads, you confront a jungle of vehicles where the unruly rickshaws dominate the scene. Particularly at busy hours, smooth flow of traffic is paralysed by their slow-paced movements, often creating a veritable pandemonium. At such moments you may get the sinking feeling that the city has been gorged with more rickshaws than even the widest avenues could accommodate.

The rickshaws thus constitute an important causative factor for intolerable road congestion in the city. According to the estimate of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), which takes care of rickshaws, their number in the city is about three lakh, nearly four times higher than the licensed ones. Although the DCC has reportedly stopped issuing new licences since 1987, new arrivals enter the streets through spurious means.

The police are responsible for their management on the streets but they exercise no control over their numbers. In the past, they, in cooperation with the DCC, made attempts to tame the unruly rickshaws but their attempts did not

prove much of a success owing to the resistance from rickshaw owners and pullers. The traffic police on their side suffer from a shortage of manpower. This makes their work of proper management of rickshaws difficult. The real difficulty was pointed out by a police official who asked, "How can you imagine managing a traffic that has thousands of untrained rickshaw pullers who, migrating to the city straight from a paddy field, grab rickshaws and come out on the streets?"

The present policy of making certain roads of the city out of bounds for rickshaws seems to be working just as a palliative. There are other important roads where the rickshaws continue to create unbearable traffic tangle. The police and the DCC have identified 18 city points that are most vulnerable to traffic jams mainly due to rickshaws. These include Motijheel Commercial Area, Gulistan, Mouchak, Farmgate, Fakirapool, Maghbazar, Malibagh and most parts of the old city.

The problem of abolition of rickshaws has human aspects linked as it is with socio-economic issues. According to a source, more than 6 lakh people — both rickshaw owners and pullers — are dependent on them. Hence no welfare government can overlook these aspects. So there is need for circumspection to ensure that, in the case of their abolition in phases, the affected people may switch over to alternative occupations, for the creation of which the government should play an active part.

Dhaka is now poised for becoming a megacity like Tokyo, Calcutta, Hong Kong. Since it is absurd to think of a megacity with primitive vehicles like rickshaws operating in its traffic system, it has now become an imperative necessity to conceive a perspective plan about gradual phasing out of this archaic conveyance. If the road transport authorities have already such a perspective plan up their sleeve, there seems to be no point in keeping it out of public knowledge. Since it is inexorable that rickshaws must make way for speedier transports sooner or later in future, it will be in the interest of the people whose subsistence depends on them if their mind is prepared well ahead in the light of the perspective plan.

Several suggestions are made by knowledgeable quarters for dealing with the problem of traffic congestion created by rickshaws. These include: development of an well-organised public transport system by introducing more buses, separation of the streets for motorised and non-motorised vehicles, constant watch by the police to ensure that the rickshaws follow their own lanes. However, in view of the growing road congestions, we seem to be fast approaching the stage where the government will have to think of going into mass transit systems, as in several cities in South East Asia. Many megacities like Calcutta, Tokyo and Hong Kong, because of space limitations, have pushed upward from street level or downward below ground to set up light railway systems. Our government may have to proceed on similar lines in future.

## SKOP strike July 7

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headquarters — Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi. The SKOP demands include: fixation of minimum wage for the workers at Taka 1400, starting production at the closed mills and factories, withdrawal of government announcement on retrenchment, stopping denationalisation, amendments to the existing labour laws, and implementation of the Pay Commission report.

Presided over by Abdullah Sarkar, the convention was addressed by the labour leaders representing different trade union federations combined under the umbrella of the SKOP.

No representative of the ruling party's labour front Jatiyatabadi Samik Dal, a component of SKOP, participated in the convention. However, Sabura Begum of Jatiyatabadi Garments Samik Dal addressed the convention and supported the SKOP programme.

Over 50 labour leaders representing the workers and employees of the railway, transport and bank sectors, jute, textiles, tea and sugar mills and chemical industries and different agricultural institutions addressed the convention throughout the day. The speakers include: Abdus Salam Khan of the CPB-backed Trade Union Centre, Belayet Hossain Majumder of the Nationalised-Autonomous Financial Institutions Workers Action Council, Abdul Latif of Biman Bangladesh CBA leader, Shafiqur Rahman Majumder, Shahjahan Khan and Abdul

Matin Master of Awami League's labour front Jatiya Samik League, Tipu Biswas, S M Rumi, Abdul Kader, Yaqub Ali Bhuiyan, Shariatullah, and Protab Uddin Ahmed.

SKOP leaders Nurul Islam, Fazlul Haq Montu, Lutfor Rahman, Mesbahuddin Ahmed, Dr Wajedul Islam Khan and Abdur Razzak were also present.

Abdullah Sarkar, chief of Samajtantrik Samik Front, strongly protested the government move to retrench workers in the state-owned enterprises. There is no excess workers, he said adding, a total of 1,04,042 posts of employees and workers were lying vacant in the government enterprises.

He demanded alternative jobs for the employees and workers prior to retrenching them.

Abdullah Sarkar held a section of corrupt high officials responsible for huge losses incurred by the nationalised institutions and demanded an inquiry into the matter. The SKOP leader also called upon the government to take measures for realisation loans of Taka 22,000 crore from 200 industrial units, identified as defaulters.

## 15 more killed in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, May 22:

Fifteen persons, including nine militants and two police constables, were killed and a Deputy Superintendent of Police was injured in Punjab last night, police said here, reports PTI.

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# East Asia on brink of major strategic changes: IISS

LONDON, May 22: East Asia is on the brink of a period of "major strategic changes", while Central Asia enters a "period of turbulence" the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) said in its 1991-1992 strategic survey, reports AFP.

"Leadership changes can no longer be far off in China", IISS Director Francois Heisbourg said, ahead of the report's publication.

Reformers, were tending to gain the upper hand in the "fragile balance" of power, but it was too early to tell if they could win the day over the old guard, the reports said.

China had "almost fully recovered from the damage caused to its international standing by the Tiananmen massacre in June 1989" and by adjusting to the post-cold world war it was poised to improve its standing still further.

Japan entered 1992 in the same good of "agonizing self-appraisal" in which it had started the previous year. All that seemed certain was that the Japanese were still uncertain about whether they should be playing an enhanced international role, and if so, what that role should be.

The economic, a sustaining force during political turmoil in 1989-1990, had begun to falter and a "succession of new scandals have tarnished Japan's image," the report said.

The Korean peninsula was caught in an acute paradox in 1991. On one hand a series of agreements between north and south had opened up for the first time the prospect of a top-level summit and real exchanges developing across the border.

On the other hand, North Korea's nuclear ambitions threatened the security of the region, the report said.

Heisbourg pointed out there was a lack of international institutions and other fora for discussion and cooperation in the region and these should be created without delay, "because prevention is better than cure."

There had been "undoubted progress" towards a peaceful settlement in Cambodia, but a serious question remained whether the UN presence would be able to fill the "evident political vacuum in the country" and permit effective implementation of the 1991 Paris Accord.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of newly independent states of the Soviet Muslim periphery, required a complete reevaluation of the frontiers of Central Asia, the report said.

"There is a general consensus that the weakening of Russian influence has created a potential vacuum for other regional powers to extend their political, economic and cultural influence," the report said.

The two major actors of South Asia, India and Pakistan, were grappling with a variety of internal political and security problems that pose the dual threats of political destabilization and territorial disintegration.

The smaller powers of the region — Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal — were having to deal with similar problems, resulting from global change and the Indo-Pakistani military confrontation.

At least in the short run, the maintenance of western-type democracies in South Asia will face increasing political pressures from violent ethnic nationalism and widespread economic dissatisfaction," the report concluded.

## Darkness under the taper

By Staff Correspondent

Believe it or not, farmers along the bank of the river Buriganga in Keraniganj upazila plough their land and till reap their crop in the glow from the capital.

Like darkness under a taper, life in 272 villages out of a total 427 in Keraniganj, which stands right across the Buriganga, go without electricity at night. A total of 155 villages have so far been brought under electrification, according to information from the upazila administration.

The Buriganga river cuts the capital Dhaka from Keraniganj, an industrial suburb. Local people say that farmers specially those having land near the river do not face difficulties in tilling by night because the area is suffused with light sent from high-rise buildings in the capital. And they really get a bonus when the flood lights of Dhaka Stadium are put on.

They explain that the light from Dhaka illuminates the river-side agricultural land in shuvaddya, Teghoria and Konda Unions because the ground level of Keraniganj is lower than that of Dhaka.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia Friday opened construction work of a 33 KV power sub-station at Kallindi area in Keraniganj, which, local people hope, would help drive away darkness.

It would also help the farmers irrigate the total of 24,000 acre of arable land in the upazila with deep and shallow tubewells and also ensure steady power supply to total of 1393 big, small and medium industrial units.

## Khaleda

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and Tourism Abdul Mannan, State Minister for Environment, Forests, Fisheries and Livestock Gayashwar Roy, local member of parliament Amanullah Aman, Convener of the Dhaka district BNP Mohiuddin Ahmed and local leaders Sultan Naser, Wahiduzzaman, Ish-tiaq Hossain and Serajuddin.

The Prime Minister, in her address, pointed out the huge system loss in the power sector and urged all to resist the malpractice unitedly.

"If we can check the huge system loss, increased number of people can have power at a cheaper rate," she said.

She described her party's efforts for attaining self-sufficiency of the country, Begum Zia said that the country spends Taka 400 crore every year in importing canned milk powder.

"Why should we spend this amount every year only to import powder milk when these are not good for child-health," she asked.

"If we can raise dairy farms in the country, people will have good milk and the money can be used for the development programmes," Begum Zia told the meeting.

Earlier, the Prime Minister dug out mud to let the water flow into the 11.5 kilometer Kharakandi-Goaduri canal which will bring 4000 acres of land under irrigation facilities. She also laid foundation stone of a local bus terminal and a 33 KV power sub-station.

On her way back to the capital, Begum Zia also visited the Keraniganj Upazila Health Complex and laid the foundation stone of the upazila dak bungalow building.

## Suchinda resigns

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He did not say if they would resign their cabinet positions.

The capital was quiet for a second day Friday, but hundreds of Thais demonstrated again at Democracy Monument, which was wreathed in black and ringed with memorial flowers for demonstrators killed by the army, according to AP.

Pro-democracy leaders announced that a mass demonstration would be held Monday, when parliament is to hold hearings on the violence.

The parliament is to begin considering the amendments May 29, and the final vote is expected a little more than a month later. If the coalition parties keep their word, passage is assured because all the opposition parties support the reforms.

"If the amendment doesn't pass then our party will withdraw its support and the government will collapse," said Preecha Pongcharekul, a legislator in the largest coalition party, the Justice Unity Party.

AFP adds: Strong rumours of a coup swept the Thai capital tonight as demands intensi-

fied that the military leaders responsible for the slaughter of more than 100 pro-democracy demonstrators early this week be punished.

Diplomatic sources described the risk as a strong possibility as the military faced the biggest threat to the traditional power they hold in Thailand.

Several embassies have put their staff on weekend alert and one Thai security firm, which has a General on its board, closed and sent workers home early after telling them there would be a coup Friday night.

The coup rumours began shortly after the fate of Thai Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon's tempestuous 45-day reign seemed sealed Friday when his Foreign Minister blamed him for the slaughter of pro-democracy demonstrators and insisted he quit.

But an army spokesman dismissed the rumours. "Absolutely not," said Colonel Ban-chorn Chawansitpa when asked whether such a development was likely.

"Rumours of a coup are being spread by the opposition," Ban-chorn added.



Bidu performing dance yesterday at a function organised by Nazrul Academy in observance of 93rd birth anniversary of rebel poet Nazrul Islam. — Star photo

## Children's rights

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to take specific measures to enforce those rights, the measures which are specified run parallel to the summit goals and include many actions required to protect the children in especially difficult circumstances (CEDC). The government proposes to establish national and local forums to promote full knowledge of the principles and provisions of the convention.

It will also carry out a review of existing laws which protect the rights of children, following which action will be taken to formulate proposals for necessary new laws to ad-

voocate their adoption. The government will also mobilize private and voluntary organisations and provide technical and financial assistance to such organisations for conducting their programmes in this regard smoothly.

It will also appoint an additional secretary with special responsibility for monitoring the progress of the programmes relating to the rights of the children. The upazila or urban community social services officers will also perform a monitoring role under the supervision of the deputy director of social services in charge of the districts.

# The Midnight File

## UNHCR may suspend relief efforts in Bosnia

GENEVA, May 22: The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said Friday it is considering suspending relief efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina after fighters hijacked a convoy of trucks carrying food and medicine. UNHCR spokeswoman Christiane Berthiaume said earlier the agency would withdraw from the former Yugoslav republic because the safety of its workers was no longer guaranteed, reports AP.

## UN admits Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia

UNITED NATIONS, May 22: The General Assembly on Friday admitted the three former Yugoslav republics of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as individual member states. The General Assembly president warned that aggression against Bosnia would result in "serious consequences," reports AP.

## Ex-BNP Minister joins AL

By Staff Correspondent

Former Minister of the BNP government Barrister Abdul Huq joined the Bangladesh Awami League expressing his confidence in its policies and ideals at a meeting with Sheikh Hasina Friday at her residence at Mintu Road.

General Secretary of AL Sajeda Chowdhury MP, Mejbahuddin Khan MP, Dr Mizanul Huq MP, Prof Abdul Mannan MP and Alhaj Rashed Mosharraf MP were present during the meeting.

Abdul Huq in a statement on the eve of his joining the Awami League said that two opposite forces now face each other with opposing ideologies. One represents the people who believe in Bangalee nationalism and the other represents the communal and reactionary force, he said, adding that the demand of the time is to unite all the patriotic, democratic and progressive forces under one banner upholding the spirit of Liberation War and Bangalee nationalism.

## Indra tour: 35 to accompany PM

A 35-member entourage is likely to accompany Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia during her forthcoming visit to India, reports UNB.

Begum Zia will pay a three-day state visit to India beginning Tuesday (May 26) at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.

The Prime Minister's entourage includes Foreign Minister A S M Mustafizur Rahman, Akbar Hossain MP, Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman, Principal Secretary to the PM Syed Hasan Ahmed, Additional Foreign Secretary A H Mahmood Ali, Secretary of the PM's office Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, Press Secretary to MP Abdus Sobhan, Director General at the PM's office Mahabubul Alam, Chief of Protocol Tufail Karim Haider and Director (South Asia) at the Foreign Ministry Shaiful Amin Khan.

Besides, an 11-member media team is likely to accompany the Prime Minister to cover the visit.

# Dhaka dist AL

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at the council session in the city while AL Publicity Secretary Mohammad Nasim, President member Zillur Rahman, Kamruzzaman, Joint Secretary Abdul Jalil and office secretary Fazlul Huq were present at Savar.

Majlish and Mantu were the President and General Secretary of the district committee until March 5 when Mantu was expelled by the Central Committee on charge of anti-party activities.

During the day-long conference divided into two sessions both groups formed a 49-member committee for the next two years.

Former MP and senior member of the district committee Jamaluddin Ahmed has been elected the General Secretary of the Mantu-group while Advocate Saifuddin Ahmed was elected its Joint Secretary.

Dhamrai Thana AL President Benfir Ahmed has been elected the General Secretary of the Majlish group, it is learnt.

Eight of the 10 presidents and secretaries from Savar, Keraniganj, Dhamrai, Nawabganj and Dohar Thana were present and were introduced to the audience at the Engineers' Institution while Majlish group claimed that nine thana presidents and secretaries were present at their conference.

Majlish group claimed that 129 out of 150 councilors were present at the conference at Savar and the Mantu group claimed that 154 out of 200 councilors were present in Dhaka.

Mantu group claimed that 30 members of the 39-man, previous committee were present at the Engineers' Institution.

Zohra Tajuddin who inaugurated the conference said that "the decision which had been

imposed upon Montu should be faced politically."

"Hasty expulsion can never solve any problem of a party and Mantu's contribution to the party must be recognised," she said.

The other leaders including Mantu said that the decision was an autocratic one and they would go for action if the expulsion order was not withdrawn at the Central Working Committee meeting on May 28.

The leaders did not elaborate the process of action saying that it would be finalised later on.

Earlier, Mantu and Mrs Tajuddin were given a standing ovation by several thousand supporters at the auditorium when they reached at around 12 noon.

They demanded withdrawal of the expulsion order.

When contacted over telephone Khan Majlish said that "only the conference at Savar had legal basis as it is approved by the Working Committee."

He claimed a huge gathering at the conference in Adhar Chandra High School premises.

A central leader in Dhaka commenting on the council said that an expelled man "can never convene or organise a council and the presence of a central leader is undesirable."

Another source said that the Central Working Committee meeting of the AL on May 28 might be stormy.

## Pay ad arrears before May 27, BSP urges govt

Bangladesh Sangbadpatra Parishad (BSP) and Bangladesh Council of Editors Friday urged the government to pay to the newspapers by May 27 all outstanding advertisement bills amounting to Taka over six crore, reports BSS.

At a joint meeting held with BSP president Barrister Motul Hossain in the chair, they said the payment of outstanding advertisement bills was immediately needed to enable newspapers meet their requirements for making necessary payments before Eid-ul-Azha.

The meeting in a resolution observed that newspapers were facing financial crisis because of improper distribution of government advertisements and severe budgetary constraints.

The meeting called for fair distribution of government advertisements and decentralisation of government and corporation advertisements. It also demanded enhancement of advertisement rates in the interest of the newspaper industry and freedom of the press.

The meeting observed that as the industry was facing financial crisis, any increase in the prices of newspaper, rate of electricity, duties on chemicals, plates, films and other materials required for printing would further aggravate the crisis in the newspaper industry.

## Russia to withdraw 40,000 troops from Poland

MOSCOW, May 22: Russian and Polish leaders signed an agreement today under which 40,000 troops of the former Soviet army will withdraw from Poland by November 15, reports Reuter.

A small group will stay behind to supervise the transit home of 200,000 troops still in Germany.

The agreement signed by Polish Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski settles the financial arrangements for the withdrawal.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Polish leader Lech Walesa signed a treaty on political cooperation, ITAR-TASS news agency said.

President Yeltsin described the treaty on friendship and cooperation between Russia and Poland as a historic event and the document opened a new page in bilateral relations, TASS said.