

Dhaka, Friday, September 4, 1992

## A Move by Benazir

The move by Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan to hold a meeting of opposition leaders from various SAARC nations in Karachi on Tuesday is both innovative and challenging, offering considerable possibilities but, indeed, a few risks. The fact that the Awami League chairperson, opposition leader Sheikh Hasina has accepted the invitation, apart from VP Singh of India, Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka and a leader from Nepal would suggest Bhutto's call has generated a positive response from within the region. It is a pity that there are no opposition parties in Bhutan and the Maldives whose representatives could take part at the Karachi meeting.

The move deserves support for the simple reason that interaction among opposition leaders in SAARC countries is just as important as a continuous dialogue among heads of governments or, for that matter, even among parliamentary groups. There are national, regional and international issues on which concerned groups, like opposition parties, undoubtedly need to develop better understanding, not necessarily a common plan of action.

The proposed Karachi meeting offers this potential. However, it also raises a few tricky questions which may well develop into unjustifiable concern in government circles. This is because little has been published in the media about the agenda for the meeting, except that it may produce what has been rather ambiguously described in the press as "SAARC Opposition", while the same report has focused on "gradual realisation among many that a change in political style is essential." It is not clear whose "political style" is being referred to. It could well be of governments in power and/or of the opposition parties. We hope, it means both.

While participants at the Karachi meeting would obviously brief one another on internal politics in their countries and, in this context, perhaps blast their governments, it is important that they do not get bogged down in this sensitive area of discussion. Instead, they will do well to look at the wider regional scene and suggest what should be done to strengthen co-operation among South Asian countries in such fields as trade, investment, joint ventures, and educational and cultural exchanges. They should feel free to say that efforts by governments in these areas have so far fallen short of popular expectations. Here is, therefore, an opportunity for opposition leaders to offer alternative programmes.

It is said that the meeting will also discuss how democratic practices can be strengthened in SAARC countries, especially in countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal which have only recently emerged from one form of authoritarian rule or another. An assessment of what is obstructing the process of consolidation of democracy is, indeed, essential. In this context, one must discuss if the opposition parties themselves have been doing their share in establishing their credentials as alternative governments. How many of them have their own shadow cabinets or specialists in such fields as agrarian reforms, industrial development, educational reforms and even defence? The tendency among most opposition parties, even in an old democracy like India, of merely reacting to government policies, often negatively, have helped little in raising the credibility of parties taking part at the Karachi meeting.

No matter what direction is given to the deliberation organised by Bhutto, it should move along constructive, regional lines and, as far as possible, avoid rhetoric, recrimination, charges and counter-charges. Let it set a new tone to the role of opposition parties in SAARC countries.

## Truant Teachers

The Dhaka University authorities look set to embark on a long-overdue course of action. According to a report in this paper Wednesday, the university has set up a committee to work out the formalities to terminate the jobs of 19 teachers who have been staying on leave abroad for a long period of time. They all have permanent teaching posts at the University and consequently nobody else can be appointed to their posts on a permanent basis. Temporary appointments do not always produce the desired result as teachers themselves say, these appointees lack a sense of belonging so vital for effective interaction with adult students. Not surprisingly, this practice which allows some to have the best of both worlds while depriving others of a permanent teaching post at the university which would otherwise be theirs has caused a lot of resentment among the local academic community, since the majority of teachers cannot expect to have the luxury of spending years abroad and still retain a permanent job in Dhaka.

It goes without saying that the practice is a most unfair one, and possibly illegal too. How these teachers have managed to get away with this kind of unethical and unprofessional thing for such a long time is a mystery. But it looks as though the authorities have finally woken up to the problem and decided to take corrective actions, including sackings. We do not know if the constitution of the university has provisions for prosecution of teachers who flout rules on leaves, but that is something the authorities could look into in good time.

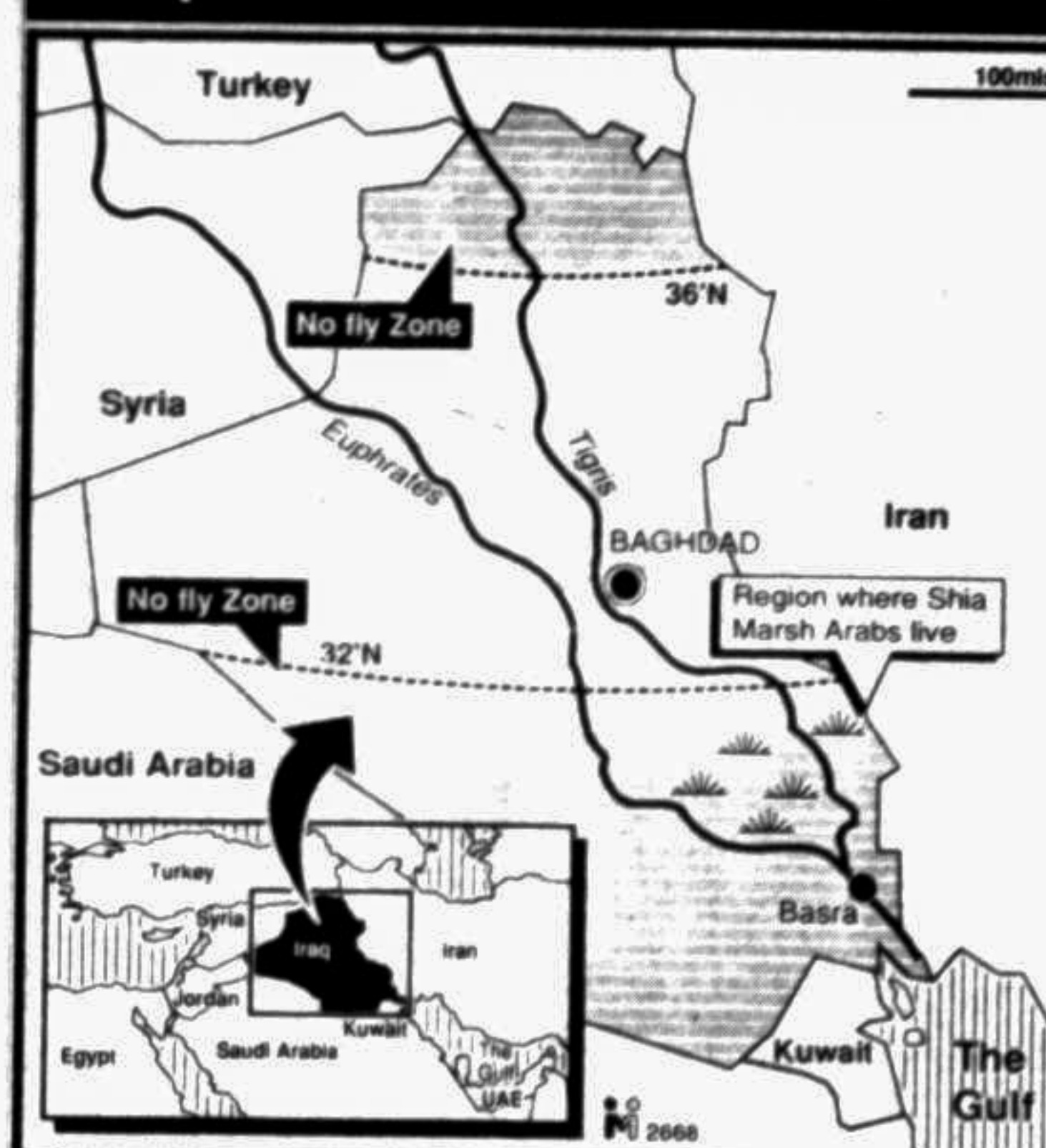
Meanwhile, though, some serious thinking seems in order to put the house in a proper shape. Sacking of 19 teachers may not be enough of a deterrent to those who may wish to continue the practice. It may be necessary for the University Senate to enact laws which would provide for automatic lapses of postings of people who overstay their leaves. For instance, teachers could be allowed five years continuous leave, with three years of extension on application within a stipulated time-frame. Anyone who fails to report for duty after the expiry of the maximum eight years leave should lose their jobs without the need for any further procedural wrangles. However, the lapsed teachers should be allowed to re-apply for jobs at the University and be considered for appointments under normal procedures i.e. given that there are vacancies and that they meet the qualifications necessary for the posts for which applications are made. Once teachers going abroad know that there would be no reprieve for overstay, then this damaging practice might end. It should be driven home to them that, while there is no objection to anyone going abroad to work, they should not expect to hang on to their posts at home as well, and thereby block somebody else's progress.

## Baghdad Bashing May Help Bush's Re-election

Michael Jansen writes from Nicosia

*Iraq remains under threat of Western military attack, ostensibly because of its refusal to comply with UN resolutions. It is 18 months since Kuwait was liberated from Iraqi occupation. But Iraq stays in the headlines. Last year it was the treatment of the Kurds, this time it is the plight of the Shias. The real reason for the sabre-rattling is Washington's desire for a new regime in Baghdad.*

## Iraq: air exclusion areas



Iraq's only port and seven of its oil wells.

No self-respecting, sovereign country could accept such terms of total surrender, terms which have been imposed by one man, US President George Bush, to humiliate and punish another man, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Contrary to claims made by Bush's Democratic opponents

that his administration had "tilted" toward Iraq and encouraged Saddam Hussein to think he had US support, early in 1990 the US made clear its outright antagonism toward Iraq.

This antagonism was displayed largely through the media, which castigated Iraq for human rights violations, its arms build-up, its acquisition

of sensitive Western technology — all activities in which a host of other Third World countries also engaged.

But the real reason for the West's increasing hostility towards Saddam Hussein was his assumption of leadership in the Arab world, consecrated by the holding of an Arab summit in Baghdad in May 1990, and Iraq's assertion that it would retaliate massively against Israel if it were to attack "any Arab country."

Thus, as soon as Iraq sent its troops into Kuwait, Bush made up his mind to go to war. His declared objective was the liberation of Kuwait, but his real aims were the destruction of Iraq's capacity to strike at Israel and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Kuwait has been liberated for 18 months now, and, because of the clash of will in July between Baghdad and UN weapons inspectors, it was revealed by Rolf Ekeus, the Swedish diplomat in charge of the inspection effort, that virtually all Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (and their delivery systems (long and medium range ballistic missiles) have been, or are being, eliminated.

This leaves Bush face-to-face with "that man," Saddam Hussein, whose ousting in Bush's remaining object for pursuing Iraqi violations of UN resolutions. Behind him Bush has the support of more than 65 per cent of the American electorate.

This means that the months of September and October

could be dangerous for Saddam Hussein, who can expect the US to step-up its efforts to destabilise his country and, to shift the present cold war to a hot war, to demonstrate before polling day on November 3 Bush's abilities as commander-in-chief.

Because of this preoccupation with Saddam Hussein, Bush has deeply offended and alienated Jordan's King Hussein, once a personal friend. For three months Jordan, which opposed the Gulf war, has been under strong US pressure to apply strictly the UN trade embargo against Iraq. At first Jordan was asked to permit the stationing of 20-30 UN monitors along its frontier with Iraq and at Aqaba port, through which all Iraq's sanctioned supplies of food and medicine pass. This was rejected by Jordan which curtailed private trade between its own and Iraqi merchants.

In July the kingdom was pressed to allow a UN team to inspect monitoring and customs arrangements along the frontier but this, too, was, reportedly, rejected.

In retaliation Jordan was threatened with the cancellation of US aid to the value of \$65 million promised for 1993. This sum, however, cannot match the more than \$300 million Jordan earns in transit dues and profits from trade with Iraq, or make up for the UN-authorized 55,000 barrels of Iraqi oil the kingdom receives daily, half of its free.

In the view of a senior Jordanian official, US pressure

was being exerted on Jordan because it had not joined "the anti-Iraq camp" as did Syria, Turkey and Egypt. Jordan, he said, remains Iraq's "window on the world," which Bush wants to shut tight, to close Iraq to the outside world and seal in its people.

To demonstrate his country's willingness to go along with UN policy, Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan said that it would agree to the proposed monitors if they were also deployed along Iraq's borders with Syria, Turkey, Iran and the Gulf countries.

All these countries are carrying on highly-profitable sanctions-busting trade with Baghdad. Turkey is, for example, providing goods in exchange for 20,000 barrels a day of cheap Iraqi diesel fuel, carried in hidden compartments slung beneath many of the 1,000 lorries that cross the border every day.

The US has "turned a blind eye" to sanction-busting by all these countries because of their participation in Desert Storm.

However, it may find it more difficult to ignore flagrant violations now because, during the latest UN-Iraqi test of wills, when Bush threatened to resume his bombing campaign, Turkey, Washington's NATO ally, refused the US use of Turkey's air bases and Syria indicated that it would not participate in renewed hostilities.

Since Iraq is out of Kuwait and no longer poses a danger to its neighbours, the UN might be allowed to turn its attention to the far more serious threat to world peace caused by war in ex-Yugoslavia. But as long as Saddam Hussein is in power, George Bush will insist that the Iraqi leader and his country should be the main focus of UN attention.

— GEMINI NEWS

## Transportation in Dhaka City

## Faulty, Problematic System Needs Early Solution

by Mahmudul Hassan

TRANSPORTATION plays a significant role in urban development of any region. In Dhaka City, different modes of transportation significantly influenced the city's growth and development pattern in different periods. From the beginning of the 20th century, motorized vehicles started plying on the roads of Dhaka. But these vehicles were very few in number then. After the partition of India in 1947, Dhaka was made the capital of the then East Pakistan, and a rapid change began in its transportation pattern. With the increase of population and area of Dhaka city, public buses, trucks and rickshaws started appearing in the roads of Dhaka.

In 1956, Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) was established and in 1961 a Master Plan for Dhaka was completed. The DIT Master Plan proposed new residential and commercial areas and new transportation routes. These projects were gradually implemented. New roads were built according to DIT Master Plan. The railway station at Fulbaria was shifted to its present site at Kamalapur.

After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, Dhaka became the capital of an independent state and its role and importance were greatly enhanced. Dhaka's population started growing rapidly and the city's physical expansion was also very fast. Many new roads, link roads were built after 1971. Pragmatic Sarani, Bijoy Sarani, Pantha Path and Rokeya Sarani were built recently. The Airport at Tejgaon was shifted to Kurmitola and it paved the way for good communication between Dhaka and Tongi. The main interdistrict bus stand at Fulbaria was removed to three new sites at Gabtali, Seyedabad and Mahakali. As a result of this, the congestion at Fulbaria was, however, reduced. The old train track connecting Fulbaria and Tejgaon was transformed

into a metalled road. But with much more motor vehicles plying in Dhaka, overcrowding and congestion have not yet reduced. Due to reckless driving of motorized vehicles, the lives of the pedestrians appear to be at stake. Moreover, the noxious exhaust from motorized vehicles is making the city's environment polluted.

## Present Transportation Modes

Present transportation modes of Dhaka city can be divided into two broad groups: 1) Slow moving vehicles (non-powered), 2) Fast moving motorized vehicles.

Slow moving vehicles include rickshaws, bicycles, push carts, etc. Of these rickshaws is the most prominent. There are about 1,50,000 rickshaws in Dhaka which amount to about 60% of the total vehicles in the city. Rickshaws carry 35% of the total passengers of Dhaka city. The use of bicycles as a mode of transport has not however, become popular like that in many other cities of the world. It is probably due to congestion, traffic jam and high rate of road accidents. Pull and push cart is used for house to house transportation of light goods.

Of the different types of motorized vehicles in Dhaka city, bus, minibus, truck, auto-rickshaws, motor-cycle and car are the most important modes. As a means of mass transportation bus and minibus come first. Buses and minibuses of Dhaka together carry 34% of the total passengers. Trucks carry goods within the city and beyond. Now increasing number of cars used by the elite, high officials and businessmen and the rich of the city. Auto rickshaw, baby taxi and auto tempo are also being increasingly used. These are costlier than public bus but cheaper than taxi cab, and that is perhaps the reason why use of taxi cab did not assume a proportion. However, a good number of people of Dhaka city use motor-cycle. Motorized

vehicles of Dhaka account for about 36% of the total vehicles of the city and about 45% passengers of Dhaka city depend upon them.

## Road Network Problem

There are problems in road network pattern of Dhaka which are also the reasons for traffic problem in the city. Some of these road network problems of Dhaka are discussed below:

There is considerable deficiency in road network system of Dhaka. Many of the roads which were proposed in Government plans, have not yet been implemented. Moreover, in many areas, there is lack of any access road. Many roads do not have proper alignment and lack in adequate road width.

Lack of adequate road width is a major problem in road network system of Dhaka city. This problem is severe in the old parts of Dhaka. Moreover, many roads in the unplanned parts of New Dhaka have remained very narrow. Road condition in many parts of Dhaka is pitiable. Many roads go under water during rainy season or after even a shower. Some roads are kutcha and many others are yet semi-pucca.

For a balanced transportation network, arterial roads of a city should occupy eight to 10 per cent of the total mileage. In Dhaka arterial roads account for less than five per cent of total mileage. In this regard Dhaka's road network suffers from inadequate arterial roads and streets. Every major city in the world usually has a by-pass route to divert the external traffic. Such by-pass road is absent in Dhaka.

## Existing Traffic Problem

Present traffic problem of Dhaka city is the outcome of network deficiency, uncontrolled traffic movement and non-implementation of traffic rules and regulations. It is also fuelled by the reckless driving of motorized vehicles and neg-

ligence, illiteracy of rickshaw pullers.

CONFUSION: In Dhaka city there is always a confusion in movement of motorized and non-motorized vehicles. Segregation of tracks for powered and non-powered vehicles is practically absent in almost all the roads. Due to this rickshaws, push carts, bullock carts, buses, trucks and cars all ply in the same track. It makes a great chaos and causes congestion and traffic jam.

PEDESTRIANS: In Dhaka city, pedestrians account for about 25% of generated traffic, but very little care is taken for them. Most of the foot paths are occupied by peddlers, hawkers and beggars. Many roads of Dhaka have no foot-path at all and pedestrians, rickshaws and motorized vehicles crowd on the same path. There are very few over-bridges and zebra-crossings for the pedestrians on major roads.

INSUFFICIENT TRANSPORTS — OVERCROWDING: Public transport in Dhaka city is very much insufficient. Public buses constitute only 2.13% of total vehicles of the city while they carry about 33% of the total passengers. This insufficiency is a great inconvenience for the travellers. Besides this, most of the public buses run with passengers double their carrying capacity. This is apparently due either to an unfair collusion between bus owners and the law enforcing authority or sheer callousness and carelessness. The bus owners allegedly, also prevent new entrepreneurs from entering into transport business.

ON THE ROAD PARKING: Public parking facility is very limited in Dhaka city. Moreover, many commercial buildings do not have adequate parking space. As a result of this, it has become a common practice to park vehicles on the road which causes an artificial congestion.

BUS STOP: In Dhaka there is no separate space for bus stops along most of the major roads. As a result public buses stand on the road, even where there is a demarcated space. It hinders normal traffic movement very much.

PUBLIC MEETINGS: It has become a tradition in Dhaka city to hold public meetings in major roads. These public meetings by the political parties in major streets make great hindrance to the city's traffic. Moreover public processions in major roads during peak traffic hour makes traffic movement difficult.

NO BY-PASS ROUTE: IN Dhaka city there is no by-pass route for the inter district traffic. So all trucks and lorries carrying goods from southern districts to northern districts and vice versa pass through the city. This causes a great trouble for Dhaka's internal traffic. RECKLESS DRIVING: The drivers of public bus and trucks of Dhaka do not abide by traffic rules and regulations. On the other hand, the rickshawpullers are also very much unaware of traffic rules, maybe because of their illiteracy. But all these cause traffic problem as well as pose hazard to both pedestrians and passengers.

## Some Suggestions

It is not an easy task to solve the traffic problems of Dhaka city within a short period. It needs combined efforts of city dwellers, development authorities, vehicle owners and drivers. Moreover, huge amount of money is needed to improve the network and other related problems. However, here some suggestions are made for improving the transportation system of Dhaka city.

Roads proposed in Government plans but yet not constructed, should be implemented as soon as possible.

Widening of the narrow roads should be done gradually.

Segregation of pedestri-

ans, slow and first moving vehicles should be done in major roads by providing separate tracks for each.

Construction of a by-pass route for Dhaka should be undertaken on priority basis.

At each bus stop provision should be kept for an extra parallel lane where buses will be able to stand without interfering the road traffic.

Public procession should be restricted during peak traffic hours. Moreover, public meeting in any road should be completely prohibited. For holding of public meetings open fields or open spaces should be earmarked.

Vehicles without any fitness certificate must be prohibited from moving on the road.

On-the-road parking must be stopped. For this, Government may make provision for parking lots in different commercial areas and owners of commercial buildings should be compelled to set aside a portion of their premise as parking space (preferably basement or ground floor).

For increasing the number of public buses in Dhaka, appropriate measures like reduction of duty, vat, tax on import of bus, mini-bus and spares should be implemented.

To facilitate pedestrian movement, existing foot-paths should be cleared of hawkers. Moreover adequate number of foot-paths, over-bridges and zebra-crossings should be constructed on priority basis.

Law enforcing authorities should make sure that traffic laws are properly followed. Stringent measure must be taken against over-taking and over-loading.

Co-ordination among different road transportation administering authorities i.e. Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), Road & Road Transport Division (RTD), Metropolitan Police, Regional Transport Authority (RTA) should be improved.

The writer is a town planner with RAJUK, Dhaka.

## To the Editor...

## Bihari camps: A rejoinder

Sir, A letter under caption "Bihari camps" written by Mr Z H Ansari, Secretary, Relief Committee, Halishahr Non-Local Camp, Chittagong, had appeared in your esteemed paper on 22.1.92. Mr Ansari waxed eloquent on the humanitarian services done in his camp before and after the devastating cyclone of 1991. We regret Mr Ansari misunderstood the fact hence his letter might have caused confusion among your valued readers.

In fact all humanitarian services were done by the Bangladesh Non-Local Refugee Projects only funded by the CAFOD of Britain. We have been advised by the CAFOD/UK to clarify the actual position which is as under:

does not have any registration in Bangladesh. It is not operational here. It is a donor agency based in Britain. Further Mr P N Austin, as mentioned in Mr Ansari's letter, was not at any time employed by the CAFOD.

We hope the above clarification will dispel the misunderstanding, if any, among the readers.

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## Biman's inaugural flight: Some pertinent questions

Sir, The recent inaugural flight of Biman to Japan has raised many questions in the

minds of taxpayers some of which are given below:

- 1) How many passengers travelled free of cost?
- 2) Based on return fare per passenger as Taka 65,442/- in the Economy Class, what is the total amount expended towards issuing free tickets?
- 3) What was the criteria for selection? Was there any announcement or advertisement by the government in this regard and was there any formal application received to avail free tickets?
- 4) Who did the selection — an individual or a body and what was the terms of reference?
- 5) What is the sales projection that Biman expects

in near future to achieve as direct contribution of each passenger who were issued free tickets?

6) Which is more beneficial from profitability point of view — a) to bring into Bangladesh potential clients and travel agents/tour operators from Japan, or b) to take cross section of people from Bangladesh to Japan?

The above questions are very pertinent from the accountability point of view, particularly for a Third World country like Bangladesh where judicious spending should be the order of the day. With the winds of democracy that now prevails in our country we as citizens would expect the people's representatives as well as

public servants to give due consideration and weightage before making any expenses out of the public coffers.

A concerned citizen

## JS debate

Sir, We very much enjoyed the hot debate speeches delivered in the parliament by the Leader of the House and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina which was telecast by BTV on August 14, 1992. Both the leaders delivered their speeches with necessary arguments but, in my observation, Khaleda Zia was more confident in her deliberations.

Meanwhile, the Opposition had failed to pass the no-confidence motion in the Jatiya Sangsad. Now the question is,

what is the use of tabling such issues? As long as BNP's majority prevails in the parliament, such motion will never get momentum. Perhaps it would be wise on the part of the Opposition to work honestly for achieving public trust and support. Whatever the Opposition's theoretical inference, BNP is still the single majority. But a majority party alone cannot ensure all the good for a country, cooperation and participation of all other parties is essential to make the country a truly happy and peaceful home. And if the Opposition really wish to come back to power they have to keep on citing their sincerity and honesty before the nation.

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