The Daily Star

DOWN TO EARTH

Pedestrians' Woes in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

The position of pedestrians in the city is an unenviable one. With the rising city population and no early prospect of improvement in the city's road infrastructure and discipline, the outlook from the pedestrian's point of view may seem depressing. The public transport situation in the city is already a shambles. In view of this, those citizens who seek to depend on their two legs to cover any distance are not in a happy position. They encounter a lot of adverse situations which make their passage to their destinations far from easy.

The footpaths are primarily meant for pedestrians. But here they do not have untrammelled freedom of movement. The prevailing scenes of encroachments on the footpaths appear to be bizarre. The problem is admittedly a difficult one. For, the number of people seeking a living on footpaths is always on the increase. Lately the problem has grown to such an extent that it is felt that counter-measures are called for on an urgent basis.

The police authorities sometimes make raids to clear the encroachers but they always reappear with uncanny resilience. As a result, the pedestrians are pushed on to the roads, impeding the free flow of vehicular traffic and creating possibilities of accidents.

A pedestrian's steps are also beset with hazards even when he tries to cross a road from one side to the other. The so-called zebra crossings for the purpose offer no guarantee of safety for the pedestrians. In fact, many accidents are known to have occurred at these points. Many vehicles, either through ignorance or carelessness, are seen to encroach with impunity on these supposedly safe zones for pedestrians. It is also observed that one-way traffic rule on certain roads is frequently violated by some vehicles, which poses a threat to the safety of pedestrians using such roads.

Another frequent lapse in traffic discipline is seen when a green traffic signal at a road junction is about to change into red. At such moments, some of the late coming vehicles in their attempt to beat the red signal, hasten their movement at break-neck speed, thereby adding to the risk of accidents to pedestrians.

For the safety and convenience of the pedestrians, it behoves the police to be firm with those who encroach upon zebra crossings or do not correctly follow traffic signals or rules.

A serious potential threat to the safety of pedestrians is posed by the existence of open manholes in some thoroughfares of the city. Such dangers, which arise from thefts of manhole covers, are seen to be existing on some important roads, such as Topkhana Road and Road No 2 Dhanmandi Residential Area. The City Corporation seems to be indifferent to tackling the situation. If necessary such danger may be met by replacing concrete covers in place of cast-iron covers which encourage thefts.

Another threat to the pedestrians, particularly at night, is created by such agencies as WASA, PDB and T&T Department when they dig up roads for laying pipes and cables. It has been observed that when the work of these agencies is done, they do not always care to level up the roads promptly. On many occasions such dug-up trenches remain open, to the danger of the pedestrians.

At certain places in the city, viz, near New Market, Court Building and Zia International Airport, there are overbridges for the use of pedestrians. It has been observed that pedestrians, by and large, tend to avoid the use of the overbridges; they would face hazards in busy traffic by making a dash across the road rather than take the trouble of climbing the overbridges for moving across.

A factor which somewhat discourages the use of overbridges is the presence of hawkers and beggars thereon. The police should be more alert in keeping the overbridges clear so that pedestrians may conveniently use them. Observers feel that the number of existing overbridges is not adequate in view of the fast growing pedestrian traffic at certain other key points.

In some advanced cities like Tokyo, Paris and Rome, there are spacious promenades and malls for the use of pedestrians only, where no vehicular traffic is allowed. In the present-day congested traffic situation in the city, such kind of sanctuaries for pedestrians is unthinkable.

In the over-all picture, the main obstructions to the pedestrians are posed by encroachers on footpaths and roadsides. This problem appears to be growing at an alarming rate. In view of this, it seems urgent that the hands of the relevant authorities should be strengthened to deal effectively with this menace to city life. While a steady policy of rehabilitation of the encroachers may be partially an answer, vigilance and preventive actions by appropriate authorities are required to keep the pavements free as far as possible. The current pavement situation presents just one aspect of the existing traffic anarchy.

Fighting in Kabul dims peace prospect

KABUL, Feb 26 : Afghan government forces and dissident guerillas exchanged sporadic rocket fire in Kabul today as Pakistani peace mediators tried to protect a fragile ceasefire, reports Reuter.

The army and fighters of the hardline Hezb-i-Islami party battled in the eastern suburbs of the shell-shattered capital in the early hours of the morning and each side blamed the other for the clashes.

Government spokesman Aziz Morad accused the dissident Hezb-i-Islami of launching an offensive against the east of the city overnight, but said government troops repulsed the attack.

Hezb-i-Islami commander Zalmai said his men were responding to cannon and heavy machinegun fire from troops loyal to fundamentalist President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

"We have not made any offensive and we have no such plan," he said.

The retired chief of Pakistan's military intelligence and strategist of much of the Mujahideen's 14-year war of resistance, Hamid Gul, negotiated a temporary ceasefire between the warring factions on February 15.

Zalmai said both Gul and Qazi Hussain Ahmed, leader of a fundamentalist opposition Pakistani party close to the Hezb, visited him and told him they had won an agreement from the government not to open fire.

The two peace mediators asked Hezb-i-Islami also to respect the ceasefire while they continued their attempts to negotiate a permanent truce.

More than 1,000 people have been killed and 6,000 injured in fierce fighting in Kabul in January and February.

Pakistan has invited the warring leaders for peace talks in Islamabad, but the Hezb has set tough conditions for attending.

Rabbani is expected to arrive as early as Monday in Islamabad on an official visit.

Hezb leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar said he would talk to Rabbani only if he agreed to be replaced by an interim government and to the holding elections within one year.

Rabbani has refused to step down and has rejected his opponents' claims that the controversial assembly that elected him last December was rigged.

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Rhinos

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The rhinos from Nepal which generally grow up to a weight of 2000 to 2500 Kg are now about 260 Kg each. They are devouring grass, banana, vegetables and apples by 30 to 40 kg each a day and quenching their thirst with 15 Kg of cow's milk each.

Five types of rhinos, which are considered as endangered species, are found in different regions of the world. Among them two species are found in Africa, two in Indonesia and the other in India.

The rhinos which have not grown their horns yet are worth Taka 30 to 40 lakh each.

"We have not yet given them names officially," the curator said, "we will decide their names at a meeting soon."

However, the authority are presently calling the male "Bahadur" and the female one "Chandni".

Bahadur and Chandni were not very happy on the first few days of their arrival. But as they got accustomed to the new environment, they showed indications of liking their new home.

"After four to five years," the curator said, "you will see them in full glory. By then they will grow up completely."

The female rhino gives birth to a cub once a year.

Meanwhile, the other heavy weight couple — the hippopotamus may give birth to a cub within the next couple of months, the curator disclosed.

The couple had earlier given birth to a male cub.

"In the near future, we are hopeful about bringing a white tiger couple from Bhubaneswar, India," the curator added.

Dr Kamal Hossain briefing the newsmen after the Democratic Forum meeting in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Chief UN administrator in Cambodia to resign

PHNOM PENH, Feb 26: The United Nations Chief Administrator in Cambodia, critical of the peacekeeping body's lack of power, has announced he is resigning, a UN official said today, reports Reuter.

Gerard Porcell, head of the UN Civil Administration Directorate, was critical of the United Nations' inability to take a tougher stand against the radical Khmer Rouge guerilla faction and the Phnom Penh government's obstruction of efforts to supervise five key ministries, the official said.

"He's leaving in early April. Gerard is very well liked in his division and many of us regret his choice," he told Reuters.

There was no immediate comment from Porcell's office as he was visiting Siem Reap in the northwest, a staff member said.

The official, who asked not to be named, said Porcell, a Frenchmen, was increasingly frustrated "by a host of things" facing the 22,000-strong United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

"Gerard feels very strongly we have not been tough enough with the D K (Khmer Rouge) and he also feels very strongly that we failed to stick it up SOC (Phnom Penh) government when we had to," the official said.

Gerard's resignation comes at a time when UNTAC is mired in crisis caused by continued fighting between the Khmer Rouge and the Phnom Penh army and a spate of politically-inspired human rights violations.

The official said many other senior UNTAC officials shared Gerard's sense of frustration but would not speak out about it.

"I think its widespread but ... for the sake of the mission, people don't want to talk about it," he said.

Gerard's job at UNTAC was probably the peacekeeping mission's toughest assignment after the military component, the official said.

Crisis in jute sector

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mills for three years since 1989-90 fiscal year. The mills got subsidy for 1989-90 and 1990-91 FY only. In 1991-92 they received subsidy for only first four months.

Identifying the labour unrest as one of the major problems, the BJMA (Bangladesh Jute Mills Association) General Secretary said, practically, the entrepreneurs had no power to take action against any worker for indiscipline or irresponsibility. In fact, the entrepreneurs had become hostage to the labour unions because of politicisation of those unions, he said.

Frequent strike called by the trade unions caused losses to the jute mills to a great extent, he added.

Momenur Rahman also termed the irrational exchange rate of dollar in the country as a vital reason behind losing the international market and demanded rationalisation of the rate. A BJMC official informed that India, the largest jute exporting country of the World, had devalued the exchange rate of dollar with its currency by 39 per cent in 1990-91 fiscal year whereas Bangladesh devalued it by only four per cent.

He also informed that 80 to 90 per cent of India's total jute production was being consumed in their country and the entrepreneurs of the jute units were earning maximum profit from their own country. Whereas the jute industries of Bangladesh were 99 per cent dependent on export, he said, adding that Bangladesh had exported a total of one and half lakh ton of jute and jute goods in the current fiscal year, whereas the local consumption was only 1500 ton during the period.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by the International Development Ireland Limited on jute sector of Bangladesh put forward a number of recommendations for implementation to make the jute sector viable. The recommendations of the study titled JUMS (Jute Manufacturing Study) include, (1) downsizing production capacity to align it with market demand and reducing the cost of production, (2) retrenching about 50,700 mill employees (about 38,500 production workers and about 12,200 officers and staff) immediately, (3) initiating substantial BMR (balancing, modernising and rehabilitation) primarily involving equipment reconditioning (including gas generator purchases) in retained mills at a cost of about Taka 3.9 billion after the sector is downsized, (4) restructuring Tk 20 billion public and private sector mill debt that mills would not be able to repay and writing off about Tk 11 billion of mostly government guaranteed BJC debt, (5) reforming policy environment, (6) improving the quality of direction and commercial management of public and private mills through establishment of commercial performance criteria, decentralising the decision making and technical assistance and training, establishing of financial and operational accountability within the sector through market-based,, commercial mechanisms, (7) putting all public sector mills up for sale and allowing their purchases as private sector interests find them viable acquisitions at fair market prices for on-going concerns, (8) down-sizing the BJC significantly, eliminating commercial role and price stabilisation responsibilities and reorganising the remaining BJC staff to meet mostly information gathering, analysis and dissemination functions on jute yields and prices, (9) winding up KEBICO and transfer of its functions, as appropriate, to the Ministries of Jute and Food, BJMC, BJMA, BJSA, Bangladesh Bank and the fertilizer corporations and (10) implementing a Jute Sector Restructuring Project that utilizes the assistance of international and local experts to stabilise the deteriorating situation in the sector to rehabilitate and revitalise mill operations and to realise financial viability in the sector.

ROK ministers

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Park Yang-sil the former President of the Women's Doctors' Association, was named Health Minister, while Hwang San-sung, a female lawyer, was named Environment Minister.

Kwon Young-ja, President of the Women's Development Institute, was named as the second minister of political affairs.

During the transition period, Kim aides had said he would trim the cabinet from 26 to 22 posts, but the cabinet named Friday comprised 24 members.

Angolan talks

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"We will do everything to ensure we leave here with solutions," Carneiro said, speaking from Addis Ababa.

In Lisbon, Portuguese television reported that the UNITA team was still in Angola, delayed by logistical problems. The talks were now expected to start on Saturday, the television said.

Diplomats in Luanda were pessimistic about the prospects of the talks, saying the two sides were far apart on several issues including UNITA's demand that the government disband para-military riot police.

Democratic Forum

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ing said.

A total of 268 Forum representatives from 41 districts attended the meeting, chaired by Dr. Kamal Hossain. Forty two of the participants spoke at the meeting.

Briefing the newsmen after conclusion of the meeting in the evening, Hossain said the main objectives of the May convention were to initiate a combined political move aimed at reuniting the pro-liberation democratic forces to address the national problems.

Replying to a question, Hossain said they had contacted the CPB, the Ganatantri Party, the NAP and the JSD (Sirajj to involve political, social and professional forces in the effort of the Forum. When asked if they had contacted the major parties, he answered, "I myself is from the Awami League." The May convention would decide on floating a new political party of those working with the Forum, he told questioner adding "we would accept whatever the convention decides."

He, however, said the Forum would continue to work even if any new party came into reality.

In response to another question, Hossain said , "Our target is to establish a 'greater political platform' through reviving the unity of those who were on the streets during past movements."

Soviet N-subs

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environment as they were to Western navies," the report said.

The report also warned that Russia, heir to the Soviet fleet, must now cope with the nuclear waste problem posed by dozens of decommissioned subs.

In all, the Soviet nuclear navy had 22, radiation-related accidents from its inception in 1956, Greenpeace said.

The 41-page report is the result of two years of research that included visits to a number of Russian bases and conversations with several high-ranking naval officers.

It described reactor meltdowns in 1979 and in 1985 and a dockside reactor explosion in 1985, all in the Pacific Fleet and all in Russian waters.

Greenpeace said the 1985 meltdown irradiated the entire crew of the K-314 and the subs commander was relieved of duty. Neither meltdown allowed radiation to escape into the atmosphere, it said.

In the dockside explosion, which took place at the Chazhma Bay shipyard, the only serious injury was to the crew chief, who got radiation sickness, Greenpeace said.

Both of the subs that had meltdowns are still tied up at the Pavlosk submarine base, 'awaiting the development of special decommissioning procedures," the report said.

In the Northern Fleet, the reactors from seven sub accidents were simply dumped in the Arctic Ocean, Greenpeace said.

The report also said Soviet nuclear subs also collided at least seven times with U.S nuclear submarines. In several cases, Russian officials denied earlier Western press reports that the collisions had sunk Soviet subs.

Greenpeace expressed alarm at the problems of disposing of the nuclear waste generated by the submarine fleet. The report said at least 30 retired submarines await decommissioning at Russian bases.

"Foreign assistance to help decommission Russian nuclear-powered submarines and covert nuclear shipyards may be essential," Joshua Handler, the author of the report said in a statement.

The Midnight File

Clinton against fresh taxes on middle-income families

WASHINGTON, Feb 26: President Clinton says he hopes to avoid raising taxes on middle-income families to reform the health care system, but he may make an exception for tobacco and other products that pose health risks. "I think health-related taxes are different," Clinton said Thursday. Vice President Gore pointed out Friday, however, that such an increase hasn't become a formal proposal. "He (Clinton) didn't raise it. A member of the press raised it in a question," Gore said on a one-hour, call-in show on NBC's "Today." Gore said "it would be premature to get into the details" of the health reform package because it "hasn't been written," reports AP.

13 hurt in Sarajevo shelling

SARAJEVO, Feb 26: At least 13 people were wounded in Sarajevo today when six shells slammed into the city in the first heavy artillery bombardment of the Serb-besieged Bosnian capital for nearly a week, hospital staff said. Two shells landed near the presidency building of Bosnia's Muslim-led government, setting a building on fire two blocks away. Four shells landed in the vicinity of the Holiday Inn hotel used by foreign journalists. Staff at two hospitals told Reuters television they had received 13 casualties from the lunchtime attack, the first of its kind on Sarajevo since President Alija Izetbegovic declared a unilateral ceasefire by government forces last Saturday.

Ctg smugglers' paradise

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ness keeping underhand connection with the some law enforcing agency personnel and other responsible officials of the government bodies — an allegation which could not be verified independently instantaneously.

But sources said such arrangements enabled the smugglers to bring contraband goods through different routes: sea, air and land.

A task force official on condition of anonymity said, "We normally make drives on receipt of specific information about smuggled goods."

"Otherwise we are to remain less active fearing any untoward incident with either the smugglers or the businessmen here," he added.

Another high ranking government official related with the task force here admitted the high influx of foreign contraband goods with the beginning of Ramzan and said "We like to continue our operation against the smuggled goods but its illegal importation can not be stopped unless our people come forward and buy the domestic products."

A disgruntled official said, "The task force here is merely playing the role of a 'signboard' as it still could not build up the necessary source networks to go for the swoop." "The lack of proper coordination among the government agencies related with the task force including Customs, BDR, police and other administration officials, is another obstacle in its way," he added.

Informed sources say, several categories of smugglers including some glamorous ladies are active here. A section of smugglers reportedly deal in the Indian goods only. They run shops and business houses in the city markets and employ the women to bring in Indian sarees and other goods through Chittagong Airport.

Market sources say, to dodge the security, those smugglers sometimes fly from Chittagong airport and return via Dhaka and reach here with the goods by train.

Another group of smugglers, most of whom have enormous cloud operate from here availing facilities at sea port, coastal belts and airport to bring costly contraband items including foreign cigarettes, electronic goods, gold and drugs worth crores of taka, sources said adding that they use sophisticated communication sets to run their activities even in the outer anchorage where large consignments are secretly unloaded.

Informed sources also say that the big wigs and kingpins of smuggling here often maintain a high profile either by joining local politics or posing themselves as social workers.

One killed, 100 injured in US bomb explosion

NEW YORK, Feb 26: The ceiling of a commuter train station under the World Trade Center collapsed Friday afternoon, injuring dozens of people and forcing the evaucation of one of the 110-story Landmark Towers, officials said, reports AP.

The collapse may have resulted from an explosion in the station of the Port Authority-Trans Hudson line. Two fires were burning in the station and heavy smoke billowed up from the subterranean station.

Initial reports indicated there were more than 100 people injured in the lunchhour accident, said Emergency Medical Service spokesman Frank McCarton. Several were apparently trapped in the rubble.

"It felt like a big boom," said Lisa Hoffman, who works at the nearby World Financial Center. "The building shook. I looked out the window to see if New Jersey had disappeared."

Christopher J. O'Mara, 42, an insurance executive on the 49th floor of the evacuated tower, said his bilding was being avacuated. "The hallways are filled with black smoke," he said. "Even the emergency lighting is off."

More than 150 firefighers were called to the scene.

AFP adds: An explosion rocked the World Trade Center today after a ceiling collapsed, killing one person and forcing the evacuation of the mammoth financial building, authorities said.

Inspector Charles Degaetano of Emergency Medical Services said several people were buried in the rubble.

"Right now we are sorting out what is a very chaotic scene," at World Trade Center complex, he said.

BJP MPs

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until Saturday.

Meanwhile, about 300 BJP workers attended a sit-down protest against the police action.

Camping outside the mausoleum of Mohandas Gandhi, India's independence leader, the protesters screamed anti-government slogans.

PTI from Patna adds: The Janata Dal leader V P Singh today observed that the BJP was opposed not only to Muslims, but the backward classes and the Hindu society as well.

Addressing a press conference here, Singh said that by opposing the fight for social justice, the BJP proved itself to be opposed to the growth of Hindu society.

Stating that the erstwhile BJP government in Uttar Pradesh had abolished the ordinance promulgated by the Dal providing 27 per cent reservation in jobs for the backward classes, Singh said that by doing so that BJP had stabbed the backward in the back.

He also said that the silence of the BJP, the largest opposition party in Parliament, over the demand for implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations amply showed that the party was opposed to the backwards.

"That is why Sangh Parivar did not ever have any backward person as its national leader," he said.

Praising the Laloo Prasad government in Bihar, he said that the Chief Minister had succeeded in maintaining communal harmony in the state, particularly at a time when the country was rocked by riots following the December six developments at Ayodhya.

Split in CPB

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transformation will pass in the meeting by majority vote and the Central Committee may convene a special congress for approval of the central body resolution.

Some hardliners believed that the transformation proposal would be rejected by the councillors and they also demanded a referendum on the issue.

Diarrhoea

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sudden rise of temperature and contaminated water were the main reasons of the latest outbreak of the disease.

Witnesses said that hundreds of patients rushed to the ICDDRB Hospital at Mohakhali during the past several days.

The centre has been facing acute space shortage and a large number of patients were placed on the floor and corridor of the hospital.

Officials said that facilities were increased in three other hospitals to accommodate the patients.