

DOWN TO EARTH Fire Hazards in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

In the process of rapid expansion of the Dhaka city, little care seems to have been taken by the authorities at the planning stage for adopting appropriate measures against fire hazards. We see the consequence in a number of recent cases. Last March, in one of the most devastating fires of recent times, 1000 slum houses and small factories were gutted on a kilometre-long area along the Buriganga river in the old part of the city. Almost the same locality witnessed an equally devastating fire in 1992 and there is no reason to rule out the possibility of recurrence of such kind of fire in future because of apparent lack of planning in the construction of the city's physical infrastructure.

The total number of fire stations in the city is 12 including one river fire station at Sadarghat. According to

sources in the Fire Service and Civil Defence Department, the existing number of fire stations in the city is not considered adequate to provide reasonable cover for fire protection and security. Yet it has been given to understand that in the personnel, fire-fighting vehicles and other equipment, the existing fire stations do not suffer from any serious handicap. In case of inadequacy of one fire station to deal with a fire in a particular area, calls for help are sent out to adjacent fire stations which pitch in to deal with the situation.

During the last three years, the total number of fire incidents in the city from various causes is as follows: 1990-3786, 1991-4605, and 1992-5391. A rising trend is noticeable. This may perhaps be explained by the growth of the city including the uncontrolled expansion of slums.

Summer is normally the season when fire incidence rises sharply. The problem of fire-fighting in the city is complicated in most cases by absence of source of water in many areas. Once the city was dotted with ponds, canals, lakes and other sources of water, in the process of growth of the city, most of such sources of water have been lost. This creates a big hurdle in fire fighting.

Most of the congested areas in the city, particularly the sprawling growth hutments and slums are fire-prone. In old Dhaka and also in some areas in the other part of the city there are lanes and by-lanes which are so narrow that in case of fire access of fire engines with their water tenders becomes impossible. In this context, the highly congested areas along the Buriganga river and also the Kamrangir Char are mostly vulnerable.

In new Dhaka we are at present confronted with another kind of problem in the matter of fire fighting. There is a growing trend of construction of high-rise buildings. In such buildings, adequate provisions for fire security and protection are a must. We are fortunate that there is not yet any serious outbreak of fire in any high-rise building in the city. Reportedly our equipment for fighting fires at high altitudes are not yet quite adequate, as in such modern cities like Hong Kong and Singapore. In such a situation, fire consciousness and periodical fire drills among residents of such buildings go a long way in promoting fire security. It seems obligatory for RAJUK to ensure that no plan for high-rise buildings gets approved without due provision for fire security, as vetted by the Fire Service Department, where necessary. Even in residential areas with projected houses of low heights, the RAJUK may also keep in view the aspect of easy access of fire engines in cases of fire.

According to the United Nations, one-third of the population of Dhaka city live in sub-human conditions. The ever-increasing growth of slums is linked to the perennial threat of fire accidents. From this angle, the question of low-cost housing in place of the growing slums forces its way before the policy-makers and economic planners. In this context, one observer commented: "If the house of the underprivileged is on fire, the state cannot save itself from the heat generated."



PM: Tree plantation

From Page 1 Col 8
planting trees along the country's coastal belts and on the newly-emerged chars with a view to protecting the areas from natural disasters.

The President and the Prime Minister have given separate messages on the occasion.

The government has also instructed all ministers to inaugurate the programme by planting saplings at their respective district headquarters and the Members of Parliament (MPs) in the thanas of their constituencies on the opening day of the nationwide programme today.

The government has decided to involve the poor and landless people of the rural areas in the plantation drive as part of its poverty alleviation programme.

It has targeted over one lakh villagers who, officials in the Environment and Forest Ministry said, would benefit from the monsoon tree plantation programme.

The target group of people will be asked to plant and nurture trees on khas lands under government supervision, officials said, adding that the villagers would be offered a considerable share of the profits from the sale of the trees after a certain period.

Policy-planners expect that involving the poor villagers, JU senate approves Tk 11.62 cr budget

By JU Correspondent
The Jahangirnagar University senate, at its adjourned meeting yesterday approved a Tk 11 crore and 62 lakh budget for 1993-94.

The 12th annual general meeting of the JU senate was adjourned on June 27 and resumed at 10 am yesterday.

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Ashura

From Page 1 Col 8

mourning processions in the city to observe the holy Ashura.

The main 'Tazia' procession, which began from the Hossaini Dalan, ended at the Azimpur graveyard. Such processions are being held in the city since the Mughal period.

A week-long fair, a traditional Muharram event, also began at Azimpur from Wednesday.

Various socio-cultural and religious organisations held Quran khwani, milad mahfils, seminars and symposia to mark the day.

The day was a public holiday. Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television aired special programmes highlighting the significance of the day.

The Bangladesh Madrassah Chhatra Dal held a seminar at the Islamic Foundation auditorium where speakers stressed the need for upholding truth and justice in all spheres of the society.

The Bangladesh Secrat Mission, Haqqani Anjuman, Dewanbagh Darbar Sharif, Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh Ahley Sunnat Wal Jamaat, Kamalla Darbar Sharif, Darbar-e-Shah Khwaja Sharfuddin Chisty, Biswa Muslim Nirjatan Protirodh Committee, Islamic Oikya Andolon, Jatya Sunni Gana Andolon and Jatya Imam Samity, among other organisations, observed the day.



A 'Tazia' procession in the city on Thursday on the occasion of 10th of Muharram. — Star photo

FBCCI for consensus to ensure industrial peace

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) has called for a national consensus to ensure industrial peace and harmony for increasing production, reports UNB.

FBCCI president Mahbubur Rahman said at the annual general meeting of the federation in Dhaka Wednesday that harmonious relationship between the management and workers was essential to run the country's industries well.

He said, along with the free-market policy a healthy labour policy and proper wage-fixation based on productivity should be framed and this calls for unity of all, irrespective of party affiliation or opinion.

The FBCCI president emphasised the increased role of the private sector for economic development, the pace of which in the past two decades has been slow due to frequent changes in policies and programmes.

The present government has been bringing various changes in economic policies and many reform measures have been undertaken but their implementation at the micro-level has continued to be slow, he observed.

Rahman called for removing the existing bottlenecks for economic rejuvenation through exchange of views with the private sector on a routine basis.

Noting the promising features of the government's industrial policy, which he felt were comparable to those of other Asian countries, the FBCCI chief remarked that an ideal policy was not enough, only its constant review and appraisal and correct implementation could bring about the desired results.

Speaking on industrial sickness, he requested the government to constitute a

FAO DG election: Cambodia may back Bangladesh

The Cambodian government is expected to support Bangladesh's candidacy for the post of Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) based in Rome, reports BSS.

The indication of Phnom Penh's 'willingness' was communicated by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the Cambodian head of state, in a letter sent to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia early this week, sources here said.

The sources said Bangladesh is generally held in high esteem among the Cambodians in view of the 'excellent services' provided by military and police forces of Bangladesh working for the UNTAC (United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia). The services of A Karim, a Bangladeshi, as chief political adviser for UNTAC, is also regarded as most commendable by the Cambodians, the sources added.

Meanwhile, Dr A Moyeen Khan MP who went to Phnom Penh as a consultant on invitation from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, Washington, returned home after holding several rounds of a meeting with newly-elected parliamentarians for the formation of an interim government which has been installed today.

Obituary

Dr Taherul Islam, Professor of the Department of Economics, Dhaka University, died of cancer at a clinic here last night, family sources said. He was 57, reports BSS.

He left behind his wife, one son and three daughters.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held today at the Dhaka University mosque after Zohr prayers.

Japanese investors still smarting

From Page 1 Col 4
ments from Japan, the Netherlands and a consortium of international financial institutions.

The MITI is providing the trade insurance for the project while the Exim Bank of Japan is investing 225 million dollars, the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund of Japan 18 million dollars while two private companies, Chiyoda and Marubeni, are investing nine million dollars each.

In separate interviews with this correspondent, both Sawaki and Katagiri, who also attended the joint committee meeting in Dhaka as an observer, talked about the problems faced by foreign investors in Bangladesh and the future prospects.

The two officials laid equal emphasis on improving the overall infrastructure in Bangladesh and providing additional incentives to foreign investors in line with what other Asian countries are offering.

"The Bangladesh government has to provide better or at least equal incentives for foreign investors compared to Vietnam and China," the MITI official said. "There should be some reason why Japanese businessmen are going to Vietnam, perhaps its image is better compared to South Asia."

He suggested providing foreign investors with a more effective tax holiday, making it easier for them to repatriate profits and a reduction of tariff

on imported machinery parts and raw materials. "Look at what other governments are doing and take necessary measures," he advised.

Sawaki also noted that lack of adequate infrastructure, even in the export processing zones, needs to be tackled immediately.

"I have heard many complaints from Japanese businessmen who have invested in Bangladesh," he said. "Transportation and hotel facilities cannot be compared with other countries of the region and even shipment of goods is a problem since it has to be trans-shipped through Singapore, Hong Kong and even Calcutta."

He pointed out that a Japanese businessman cannot reach Bangladesh in one day and termed it as a "natural disadvantage".

He added that a Japanese government proposal to convert the Chittagong airport into an international one is still awaiting a reply from the Bangladesh government.

Both Sawaki and the MITI official also laid special emphasis on improving the living conditions for foreign investors in Bangladesh and in providing adequate flood and disaster protection to the industries.

More eating places, particularly Japanese restaurants, and improved rest and recreation facilities have to be provided to attract Japanese businessmen, Katagiri pointed out. "We are expecting the

Bangladesh government to recognise such needs, to make it an easier place for Japanese businessmen to live in."

However, he acknowledged that there is also a need on the part of the Japanese government to convince local businessmen to invest in Bangladesh while the overseas development assistance can be used to improve the infrastructure.

"We know the economic and political importance of the region and we recognise that Bangladesh's expectation from Japan is very high," Katagiri added.

Saying that a publicity drive in Japan is needed to attract businessmen to invest in Bangladesh, the MITI official noted that there is ample scope for setting up manufacturing bases in the country to export goods to Europe, the United States, Japan and even to the newly independent central Asian states.

Sawaki, who made three visits to Bangladesh during the past three years, echoed the concerns of Japanese investors for the lack of adequate flood protection for their industries.

He noted that a number of factories in the Chittagong Export Processing Zone were damaged during the cyclone in 1991.

"After the cyclone we proposed that some money is spent for protection of the CEPEZ but the scheme undertaken is not progressing very well," he regretted.

The Midnight File

Brawl in Bihar Muslim religious procession; Three killed

NEW DELHI, July 2: Police shot two people dead and crowds beat a police driver to death when a Muslim religious procession degenerated into a brawl in India's eastern state of Bihar today, local news agencies reported. They said rival groups of marchers started fighting over who should lead the procession at Katra in Nalanda district, reports Reuter.

PLO may reject US document

AMMAN, July 2: The PLO will probably reject a US document designed to bridge the gap between Israelis and Palestinians on self-government in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinian sources said today. The executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) is meeting Palestinian negotiators in Tunis to take a stand on the document, which the negotiators received in Washington on Wednesday, they said, reports Reuter.

Haiti to reinstate Aristide

NEW YORK, July 2: Haitian military leaders announced today that they have accepted a plan to reinstate ousted President Jean Bertrand Aristide on October 30. A spokesman for General Raoul Cedras said that the plan proposed Thursday by international mediator Deante Caputo was acceptable except for "some details that need to be ironed out," reports AFP.

Over 100 drown in Philippines

BOCAUE (Philippines), July 2: More than 100 people drowned when three overloaded boats sank during a religious procession on a river outside Manila, Philippine officials said tonight. Dozens of people, including many children, were reported missing after a 30-foot (10 metre) high pagoda carried by the boats, lashed together and packed with over 300 people crashed into the Murky river on Friday evening, reports Reuter.

Ukraine claims ownership of ex-Soviet N-arms

KIEV, July 2: Ukraine's Parliament today proclaimed ownership rights over former Soviet nuclear weapons deployed on its territory, reports Reuter.

Deputies approved by 226 votes to 15 a foreign policy doctrine which declared Ukraine 'owns nuclear weapons on its territory.' But the

Maglaj town cut off from rest of Bosnia

VITEZ (Bosnia), July 2: Serb and Croat forces have surrounded the town of Maglaj after more than a week of heavy fighting, apparently creating a new Muslim enclave in central Bosnia, UN officials said today, reports Reuter.

They said the Maglaj finger, a salient of territory surrounded by Serb-conquered areas in the central Bosnian heartland, was now effectively cut off from the rest of Bosnia.

Somali gunmen kill 3 Italian UN soldiers

MOGADISHU, July 2: Three Italian UN soldiers were killed and at least 14 Italians and eight Somalis were wounded during an attempted arms sweep in Mogadishu today, hospital sources said, reports Reuter.

Sources at a US hospital in the UN compound in Mogadishu said they had received the body of one Italian soldier, the first of Italy's 2,200-strong contingent to be killed in the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM).

Other hospital sources said at least 14 Italian troops were admitted, apparently hit by Somali gunmen.

Steel Mills

From page 1 col 7
in 1992-93 while the import duty on finished billet was reduced to 15 per cent and VAT and other taxes reduced to 17.25 per cent during the same period.

At present, the CSM has an outstanding liability of Tk 333.21 crore including bank loan of Tk 200.14 crore. The factory needs another Tk 190 crore to resume its operation, which it was not being able to manage from the banks in its present situation.

Another official of the CSM said the machinery of the factory, set up in 1965, were affected seriously by the devastating cyclone that hit the coastal belt on April 29, 1991. The saline water which inundated the mills area during the tidal surge corroded some of the machines. He mentioned that no measures had been taken to repair the machinery, nor efforts made to modernise the plant.

The Chittagong Steel Mills Limited, which was set up with Japanese financial and technical assistance, started its commercial operation in August, 1967 with an investment of then Rs 300 crore.

The seven manufacturing units of the CSM are: the melting shop, the blooming mill, the bar mill, the sheet and plate mill, the heavy plate mill, the galvanizing shop and the casting and forging shop.

The factory has an annual capacity of manufacturing 1.46,000 metric tonnes of MS billet, 72,000 mt MS plate, 60,000 MS sheet and 10,000 tonnes of other steel products.

4 electrocuted in city

By DMCH Correspondent
Four persons including three members of a family were electrocuted in the city Friday afternoon.

Sathi (8), her father Abdul Haque (40), and her grandmother Pari Banu (60) were killed and her mother Kohinoor Begum (30) was injured when the came in contact of a electrified wire set for hanging clothes at 46/1, Abdul Aziz Lane at Lalbag in the city at about 3:30 pm yesterday.

Kohinoor Begum was released from Mitford Hospital after first aid. The bodies were sent to the Mitford Hospital Morgue.

BSS adds from Savar: Nazrul Islam (18), a hotel boy died on the spot and Abdur Rab (40) was seriously injured after being electrocuted at the Dairy Farm Gate yesterday.

The victims were trying to hang wet clothes on a live wire. It was reported. The body of the deceased was sent to DMCH for autopsy.

Sharif

From Page 1 Col 5
Sharif sought the parliament's mandate after the President, who has been locked in a power struggle with him since early this year, refused to sack Punjab Governor Chaudury Altaf Hussain.

The Governor had dissolved the Provincial Assembly twice in a month and vowed to 'resist' Sharif's move to take control of the politically crucial province.

Soon after the resolution, the hostile Punjab government of Chief Minister Manzoor Watto deployed police around vital installations, saying the federal government had ordered paramilitary Rangers into action.

Describing the Punjab government as Ishaq Khan's 'proxy,' Musahid told foreign journalists that it wanted a 'clash' with the federal government.

But, he said, "We are going to follow the legal path as we have been doing in the past," and denied the Rangers had been ordered to take control of administrative and political offices in Punjab.