

DOWN TO EARTH

Passengers' Woes at Dhaka Airport

By ASM Nurunnabi

Generally passengers in our country get a raw deal, be it at a railway station, launchboat or at a bus terminal, at the hands of the persons associated with baggage handling and operation of transports. When a passenger happens to carry a heavy load of baggage, the extent of harassment from those persons increases all the more. In the case of an air passenger, particularly an incoming one passing through the Dhaka airport, similar harassment awaits him.

The Zia International Airport has become a overcrowded place with hundreds of passengers passing through it every day. In conformity with its condition as such, it is expected that it will maintain a suitable standard of discipline, orderliness and security. But such expectation is belied by the actual situation prevailing there.

This gives rise to the question why the concerned authorities are not alive to the problems and take appropriate remedial measures. Complaints made through the media and otherwise bring no relief.

The test of patience of an incoming passenger begins the moment he comes out of the arrival lounge. Drivers of taxis, minibuses and baby taxis — ten to fifteen of them — swoop on him and begin tugging his luggage. The passenger naturally gets bewildered.

In this state of bewilderment he sometimes finds part of his luggage snatched from his and hauled into one of the taxis or minibuses by one of the hus-

ters. To save himself from further harassment and also his luggage, he finds himself compelled to come to terms with one of the cab drivers. The latter then demands arbitrary fare of him. Say, where a trip to Mirpur would cost Tk 150/- to Tk 175/- the cab driver would ask for 500/- and the baffled passenger finds himself with no other alternative but to agree to the exorbitant fare. The unfortunate thing is that there is no authority at the airport to regulate the taxi-drivers and their fares.

It seemed once that the situation in this regard was somewhat better sometime ago. Previously a booth was located on the airport premises from which tickets were issued to intending passengers with the serial number of the waiting taxi and the amount of fare to be paid for each destination. From the point of view of security also, this system was welcomed by passengers. It, however, has been lately found that the taxi booth is not on the airport premises. It is said to have been shifted outside. So it has now become difficult for an air passenger to locate such taxi booth readily.

In this context, by way of example, the practice followed at Singapore or Kuala Lumpur airport may be cited. At those airports, taxis queue up at the exit gate and the passengers board the taxis in an orderly manner. There is no hubbub, no haggling over fares, for fares are regulated by metres.

It is strange why we have

failed to introduce even some semblance of such discipline in our airport. The indiscipline and confusion at the exit gate are further aggravated by a swarm of beggars who surround the incoming passengers like leeches. The nuisance created by these beggars leaves a poor impression particularly on foreign travellers.

It is believed that a well organized gang operates here without hindrance. Some members of the security staff of the airport are alleged to be involved with them. Observers who feel concerned at these developments wonder why no effective step is taken to break this ring and assure air travellers a measure of safety and security.

There are also allegations of harassment of air passengers who fail to satisfy interested personnel at the time of custom checking. Such allegations are made from time to time. It is felt that the higher authorities should remain vigilant in this regard.

The part of our manpower employed abroad is an important source of our foreign exchange earnings. To give them a fair deal when they come home and also to establish an unsullied image of the airport for all air passengers, it behoves the concerned authorities to take appropriate steps to break the ring of shady elements, thereby bringing an end to the harassment and inconvenience suffered daily by air travellers at the Dhaka airport.



Bangladesh Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman receiving the European Commission Vice President Manuel Marin at the Zia International Airport yesterday. — Star photo

Saifur tells newsmen at ZIA Dhaka to get \$215m from S. Arabia, Kuwait, IDB

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said Bangladesh will receive 215 million US dollars assistance from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Islamic Development Bank, reports BSS.

Rahman was briefing newsmen at the Zia International Airport here yesterday morning on his arrival from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Out of the 215 million dollars the Kuwait government's share will be around 90 million dollars while the Saudi financial assistance will be around 100 million dollars and rest 25 million dollars will be provided by the IDB.

Termining his trip as a very fruitful one, the Finance Minister said Saudi Arabia had agreed to build the Bangladesh-Saudi Friendship Bridge over the River Dhawshari and provide assistance for balancing, modernisation and expansion of the Eastern Refinery in Chittagong.

Rahman said the Ameer of Kuwait told him that Kuwait

EC assistance

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Minister highlighted the development efforts of the government as well as mixed economy, open market policy and incentives to the investors.

Mostafiz also referred to the Bangladesh-EC joint efforts in implementing the Flood Action Plan.

He said Dhaka is keenly waiting to welcome a 20-member team of European parliament team due in October.

The Foreign Minister apprised the EC delegation of Bangladesh's efforts in tackling the Rohingya refugee problem and Chakma issue.

Bangladesh's stand on protecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia-Herzegovina also figured in the discussion.

He hoped that UNHCR chief Ms Sadako Ogata's planned visit to Myanmar in near future would pave the way for UN presence there to supervise repatriation of the Rohingya refugees.

Besides, the Bangladesh side at the talks focussed on possible cooperation between SAARC and EC in different fields, particularly poverty alleviation, environment and family planning. A joint SAARC-EC consultative committee will streamline this cooperation.

Dhaka hoped that the Maastricht treaty on European union adopted in December 1991 would be implemented.

Earlier, Manuel Marin said Bangladesh is working hard to accelerate development.

Talking to newsmen at the airport on his arrival yesterday afternoon on a three day visit, Marin also appreciated the on-going democratisation process in the country.

Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman received him at the airport. Bangladesh Ambassador in Brussels Hassan Ahmed and EC mission chief in Dhaka J Bailey were also present.

He disclosed that he would sign a specific protocol with Bangladesh on determining avenues of future cooperation.

Opposition fronts to back BJP-led no-confidence

NEW DELHI, July 23: India's centrist-leftist opposition alliance said today it would back a no-confidence motion moved by a rival Hindu party to vote out the government of Prime Minister P V Narsimha Rao, reports AFP.

The National Front and Left Front said after a meeting that they had overcome their reservations on siding with the Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) when parliament takes up the motion here next week.

Strike paralyses Calcutta

CALCUTTA, July 23: Calcutta was virtually paralysed today by an opposition strike in protest against the police shooting of 13 demonstrators, and the East Indian city was braced for possible violence, reports Reuter.

The normally teeming streets of India's most populous city of 11 million were virtually deserted and there was hardly any public transport.

Major wins confidence

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rebel legislator Teresa Gorman. Most of the 332 Conservatives in the 651-member Commons, she added, "will not put themselves in for a general election because under this Prime Minister we will lose."

Major, whose opinion poll standing is the lowest of any prime minister since the 1930s, called for the parliamentary showdown Thursday after losing the second of two key votes on the treaty.

The call for a vote of confidence capped a night of high drama and emotional debate over a Labour Party motion to force Major to sign up to the same charter of workers' rights adopted by other members of

The Midnight File

Tribunal set up to hear environmental cases

THE HAGUE (Netherlands), July 23: The World Court has set up a tribunal to hear environmental cases, the first chamber to focus on a single issue in the court's 48-year history. The 15-judge judicial arm of the United Nations set up the special chamber because environmental cases are increasing, a court registry official said Friday, reports AP.

\$75m EC grant for Yugoslav refugees

BRUSSELS, July 23: The European Community granted 75 million dollars in humanitarian aid today to refugees and other victims of the war in the former Yugoslavia, an EC Commission spokesman said. The donation, most of which will go to people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, brings the EC's total aid to the ex-Yugoslavia to the equivalent of 585 million dollars since the conflict began in September 1991, the spokesman said, reports AFP.

Delhi arrests Pak embassy staff for 'spying'

NEW DELHI, July 23: Indian authorities arrested a Pakistan Embassy employee on Friday and accused him of spying, but Pakistan denied the charge and said police tortured the man, reports AP.

Both countries said they would file formal complaints, but neither one appeared ready to scrap a code of conduct they signed in August, promising to protect each others embassy workers.

India and Pakistan, South Asia's archenemies, often accuse each other of attacking their embassy employees and their homes, falsely charging them with spying, and sending them home.

Friday marked the second time in seven months that the Pakistani Embassy has accused Indian authorities of beating one of its workers and held a news conference to show the injured man.

Ship movement

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continued few more days. He informed that the officials of Kaptai project were asked today to reduce the rate of water discharge considering the port situation but they expressed inability to do it because of danger level at the lake.

Meanwhile, the two private owned barges which sank into the Karnafuli river Thursday night due to current from the tides at Banglabazar ghat, are yet to be rescued. The two barges anchored there with cement loads were driven away by the spate of river water flowing from the Kaptai Dam, officials said.

JP : Struggle

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workers over the present leadership but nobody dared to challenge it.

"I became vocal at the request of some dedicated party workers who want to reconstruct and rebuild the party," Huda who joined hands with Ershad in 1983 told The Daily Star.

He said most of the former JP ministers were facing corruption charges and were therefore afraid of being actively involved in party activities. Mizan Chowdhury never led any political party, he is only reaping pecuniary benefits by keeping Ershad in jail, Huda added.

"Ershad is now a financial necessity to them," the JP dissident said adding that "Mizan Chowdhury co-opted his favourite, Syeed Tarique in the presidium to run the party in his own manner."

"As a founder I can never tolerate this situation," he added.

Replying to a question regarding his alleged connections with the present government he said that "none from the ruling party contacted him."

"Another journalist the other day asked me if I were given a cheque of Tk 10 crore to split the JP," he continued.

"I told that reporter to come and cash the cheque as there was a little anomaly in the signature," he quipped.

The former Speaker who served BNP government between 1977 to 1986 as minister, said a section of the party members insisted on forming a forum of parties who believed in Bangladeshi nationalism but their suggestion was ignored by the present JP heavy weights.

He mentioned JSD (Rah) and a faction of the Muslim League as parts of the said forum. He was very critical about the Awami League during the interview and alleged that Mizan Chowdhury had already turned the party into the B-team of the AL.

Shamsul Huda Chowdhury said that party Secretary General Khaledur Rahman Tito came to his residence and promised that he would go ahead with the proposed forum. Moudud Ahmed and a number of other leaders phoned him to discuss the latest development in this regard, he added. "We are watching the movements of the JP leadership with guarded optimism," he remarked.

Dollar

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based on their previous day's report of dollar rates in New York and Tokyo markets. But with the new system, this advantage has been wiped out.



Flood situation worsens

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the Shomeshwari, were flowing above the danger level while three others have registered further rise.

Waters of the river Brahmaputra, the Surma, the Kushiyara, the Meghna and the Gumti Thursday rose by an average 10 centimetres above the danger levels.

The Brahmaputra at Chilmari was recorded 11 cm above the danger mark, while at Bahadurabad, the river swelled by 21 cm.

The Dharala at Kurigram showed a 39 cm fall but still flowing 44 cm over the red mark.

The Surma at Sunamganj fell by eight centimetres while it rose by four centimetres at Sylhet.

The river Manu, recorded at the Manu Railway Bridge showed a 43 cm fall Thursday but the river was still flowing 128cm over the red mark.

The Mulari and the Sangu in the Chittagong Hill Tracts have shown a downward trend Thursday, the FFC report said.

The bulletin forecast that with the water dropping down from the north, areas from Bahadurabad to Sirajganj was likely to suffer fresh inundation.

It means that the flood waters would now affect the middle part of the country, one of the WDB official predicted.

Flood situation in Sylhet, Sunamganj, Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Comilla districts in the next 24 hours might remain unchanged, the bulletin forecast.

Our staff correspondent in Chittagong reports, different sources yesterday confirmed three more deaths in different flood affected areas of Chittagong district.

One person died in Fatickhan, sources informed, one in Bosalkhali and one in Rauzan. Another person died in Patia yesterday.

Meanwhile, the flood situation in the greater Chittagong area remained unchanged yes-

terday as water continued to flow from the Kaptai Dam steadily.

Road links between Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Rangamati and Khagrachhari remained suspended as the highways in many places were submerged under three to five feet of water.

The road link between Chittagong-Rangamati and Chittagong-Kaptai are mainly cut off due to heavy landslides.

According to the district administration, 17,000 people

not be made due to the rainfall, the administration feared the death toll would rise.

Our correspondent from Sylhet says, the overall flood situation worsened in the Sylhet region yesterday with inundation of new areas in different thanas. At least 4 lakh people became marooned in the region.

New areas are being submerged as flood waters started rushing through the new breaches developed in different flood control embankments.

The Hobiganj and Moulvibazar town protection embankments, were still under threat.

The onrush of flood waters from the hilly areas across the border has also increased.

The Balaganj and Fenchuganj thana headquarters went under 3 feet water.

About 5000 people took shelter in 15 flood shelters in Moulvibazar district. In Habiganj district, only two flood shelters had been opened in Madhabpur thana, while no flood shelter has yet been set up anywhere in Sylhet district.

Our Gaibandha correspondent says that the flood situation of the district has taken a serious turn Thursday partly inundating the Gaibandha municipal area.

Our correspondent in Netrokona reported that almost all the 10 thanas of the district have fallen in the grip of the flood.

According to the local district officials, six people have lost their lives till Thursday.

District officials of Kurigram said that at least 16 lakh people have been affected by floods.

Lalmohar District Control Room said that erosion in the river Teesta was severe.

Comilla district control room officials said that more than 70 thousand people have been affected by the flood waters in the district. Burichang and Chandina were the worst-hit areas, the officials said.

BSS adds: Deputy Commissioner of Feni told that deteriorating flood situations in the district had rendered over ten thousand people marooned in nine unions of Parshuram and Sadar thanas.

UNB adds: The flood situation in the Sirajganj district took a serious turn as the water level in river Jamuna crossed its danger mark at 12 noon yesterday.

Dr Kamal

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cess and demanded that bureaucratic obstacles be removed.

He hailed parliament for reviving the "dead" Parliamentary Probe Committee on corruption and said the legislature has the power to do anything that would bring welfare to the people.

But, he alleged that some corrupt people were made members of the committee and suggested that they be removed for the success of the committee.

City transport

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International Corporation of Canada and Development Design Consultants Limited of Bangladesh are working on the matter under the Planning Commission.

A mid-term report of the study, which contained the short-term action plan, has already been submitted to the government, the sources said.

According to the sources, the study deals with almost all the aspects of the sector, including the transport industry, its financial viability, administration, legal aspects and services.

The action plans for individual aspects were narrated in 33 separate papers of the mid-term report, the sources said.

The final report of the study is likely to be submitted to the government in February next year, the sources pointed out.

An official of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) told The Daily Star that the transport system in Dhaka has not been in pace with the modern methods of urban transportation since no comprehensive measures were taken earlier to improve it.

He, however, hoped that implementation of the recommendations of the ongoing study would help bring discipline and order in the sector as well as ensure improved services for the people.

Pak cabinet

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Sharif and his archenemy Ghulam Ishaq Khan quit their posts as prime minister and president respectively on Sunday in an army-brokered deal to end a feud between them that had paralysed government for six months. Sharif dissolved parliament.

Interim governments have been set up in the capital and the four provinces to oversee the national elections on October 6 and provincial elections on October 9.

Sharif and his chief rival, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, have insisted on a neutral interim government to try to prevent the rigging that allegedly marred the last elections in 1990. Those polls brought Sharif to power three months after Bhutto was sacked.