

## DOWN TO EARTH

### Quality of Dhaka City Roads!

By A S M Nurunnabi

Dhaka City roads are unusually shortlived. This is a serious weakness in the city's road infrastructure. This is no new thing; it has been inherent in our road construction projects for decades. The result has been huge wastage of public money, not to speak of the great sufferings of the road users.

Every monsoon takes a heavy toll of city roads, particularly when downpours are heavy and the city roads become waterlogged on account of faulty drainage system. There are other cities in the world subject to similar weather conditions. The sad difference is that they are found to withstand the onslaught of adverse weather situations, whereas our city roads miserably fail in that respect.

Following the monsoon, repairs to the roads are not taken up and completed promptly. Before completion of repair works, another monsoon sets in. In this way a vicious circle goes on with it suffering of the city dwellers.

According to available statistics, there are 1987.48 km of roads within the city jurisdiction. No information is available from the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) as to the classification of types of these roads. It is understood that during the last financial year 1992-93, Taka 250 million was spent by the DCC on maintenance and development of public thoroughfares. During the current financial year, the total outlay on this account is reported to be Taka 370 million.

Despite millions of Taka spent each year, the city roads present no sign of durable improvement. In fact roads in rotten condition are scattered all over the city. In most cases excessive bumps, depressions and potholes characterise the city's road network. On such roads comfortable ride is impossible and sometimes it is hazardous. Under these conditions it is not possible for vehicles to move at a desirable speed with the added impediment of slow moving multitude of rickshaws. The nation pays a price on this account. It suffers incalculable loss in lost man-hour and unnecessary fuel consumption.

Such situation is not found in similar cities in the developing countries. There, roads carry more traffic and considerably heavier trucks than our city roads. Yet the roads in those countries are smoother and more durable. The reason is that those roads are designed and constructed with appropri-

ate standards of materials and technology to last longer than the Dhaka city roads.

The poor quality of work in construction of Dhaka city roads seems in a large measure due to the work awarding system of the DCC. The normal practice here is to award the work order to the lowest bidder. There lies the rub. Certain contractors in their bid to win a particular work tender quotes a price much lower than the estimated cost of the work. The contract awarding authority does not question how the desired quality of work can be possible with the quoted low rates.

Since the contractors are in business for profit, they keep a safe margin of profit for themselves by using dubious quality materials and work procedure. It will appear even from casual observation how quality is sacrificed on the score of lowest tender system. Another frequent excuse is that due to shortage of funds, roads are not built according to the specifications, which account for their lower

longevity.

Other reasons for lesser life span of Dhaka city roads relate to gross defects in construction procedures. Here there are mainly two types of roads — bituminous and concrete. In neither type of road construction, the correct procedure and proportion of mixture of materials are followed. The result is poor quality of work.

Observers are therefore of the view that under the present contracting system with the absence of quality control, the huge expenditure on construction and repair of roads serves no durable purpose. The urgent need, therefore, is to review the contracting procedures and to introduce a strict system of quality control. It is felt that as in other countries, the authorities should insist on strict implementation of the given specification of roads under a performance contract system. There should be an end to the existing practice of sloppiest work with shoddiest materials in road construction.



### World hails PLO, Israel

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trade agreement with Israel and review aid agreements that provide \$1.7 billion in grants and soft loans to Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon from 1992 to 1996, officials said.

British Prime Minister John Major, on a visit to Inverness, Scotland called the accord 'a brave deal.'

"Very often decisions which are right are unpopular," said Major, referring to outrage among both Israeli and Palestinian hard-liners. "It does not make them less right."

Germany, which has been generous with aid to Israel, said it would expand relations with the PLO but gave no specifics.

"I know that many questions remain to be settled. But now there can be no way back," said German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel.

United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Ghali on Wednesday said he would set up a task force to promote the development of the autonomous Palestinian regions, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

The Spanish government praised "the moral courage" of Israel and the PLO and announced that King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia will visit Israel in November. It would be the first visit by a Spanish monarch.

Egypt welcomed on Thursday the mutual recognition by the PLO and Israel as an important step towards full peace. Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told reporters.

Jordan today held back on welcoming Israeli-PLO recognition until it received details and termed as "optimistic" Israeli comments that the Jewish state could reach a deal with Amman next week.

But Iran's Chief Justice Ayatollah Mohamad Yazdi today rejected the accord as a

"betrayal of the Arab cause."

AFP adds: While the rest of the world raved about the Middle East peace accord, countries in the Asia-Pacific region gave only a muted response today to the historic deal.

Japan today said it wel-

comes the agreement to celebrate historic moment.

HARARE, Sept 10: Israeli and PLO envoys, never before on speaking terms, met in Zimbabwe today to watch Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sign a pact recognising the Palestine Liberation Organisation, reports Reuter.

In Pakistan, a foreign office spokesman said Thursday that Rabin had sought Pakistan's support in the Middle East peace process in letter to Pakistan's acting President Wasim Sajjad.

Pakistan is following the developments very carefully and our blessings are with the Palestinian people," he said.

In Seoul, a Foreign Ministry official said South Korea wanted to take part in the reconstruction of the Palestinian autonomous regions.

The Philippines also welcomed the accord, saying Manila had close relations with both the PLO and Israel.

The Thai Foreign Ministry said in a statement the government welcomed the peace negotiations and applauded the parties concerned.

The Sri Lankan government welcomed the accord, saying both sides should be encouraged towards further progress.

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