

DOWN TO EARTH

Quality of Dhaka City Roads!

By A S M Nurunnabi

Dhaka City roads are unusually short-lived. 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 and with it sufferings of the city dwellers.

According to available statistics, there are 1967.48 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 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 appropriate 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 quote 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 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 Mohammad 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-

They embrace 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 Reuters.

Aaron Liel, Israel's ambassador to South Africa, and PLO representative in Zimbabwe Ali Halameh embraced in the PLO offices in Harare before watching a live television broadcast of the ceremony in Jerusalem.

"We are celebrating this historic moment. We have to talk to each other and have more confidence-building measures such as our meeting if we are to consolidate the peace," Halameh said.

Liel, sipping coffee beside the PLO envoy, agreed. "It's a very happy day and I will be delighted to meet Halameh again."

came the accord, and expressed hope the breakthrough would help advances in other peace negotiations in the Middle East.

Beijing earlier said it welcomed plans for the agreement more than a week ago, but 24 hours after news of the signing of the historic accord, Beijing had yet to respond officially.

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Indo-Pak accord to combat cross-border drug trafficking

NEW DELHI, Sept 10: India and Pakistan have decided to combat cross-border drug trafficking in a first-ever joint battle against narcotic cartels using the two countries as a springboard for markets in Europe, reports AFP.

Indian officials said today that anti-narcotics experts from the two countries ended two days of discussion here Thursday with an official protocol to launch a crusade against drug traffickers.

Enforcement agencies of India and Pakistan will help each other pinpoint drug routes on their common borders and work on strategies to prevent onward smuggling by air or sea, the officials said. The two neighbours will establish data banks on drug cartels operating in their territory and exchange information obtained from confessions of arrested traffickers under the protocol.

Thursday's agreement marks the first effort at bilateral cooperation to fight proliferating

drug traffic between India and Pakistan, who share thousands of kilometres of mountainous and desert border.

Officials said enforcement agencies of the two countries will also cooperate in investigating money laundering rackets run by drug traders.

Drug enforcement agencies describe Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan as the golden crescent, which caters to narcotics markets of Europe, the United States and even Russia.

Supplies from Pakistan and Iran mainly originate from the vast poppy fields of Afghanistan.

Drug traffickers from the Golden Triangle, encompassing areas of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, use India as a transit country to ship heroin and other narcotic derivatives to the West.

India has in recent years turned from a transit into a user country with an estimated 120,000 drug addicts in its cities and towns, officials here say.

Officials said the New Delhi

discussions were led by I M Mohsin, chairman of Pakistan's Narcotic Control Bureau and BK Aggarwal, chief of India's directorate of revenue intelligence.

Customs officials and heads of frontier forces of the two countries also participated in the talks, they said.

"Our aim is to overcome this common enemy which has wrought enough havoc."

It can only be solved through internal cooperation, on which the Indo-Pakistan factor is a link in a chain," Mohsin said of the cross-border drug trade.

The Pakistani official said strained political and military ties between the two nations had not affected cooperation between the enforcement agencies of India and Pakistan.

"Though it has cast shadows now and then, the relationship between the two agencies is not affected at all," he said of frequent frictions in bilateral ties between the two South Asian arch-rivals.

Old foes take step

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of our national responsibility we announce our intention to shed the blood of the treasonous Arafat for Palestine, its martyrs, its Intifada (uprising) and all the agonies of its people," said a statement in Beirut from the Fatah uprising led by Abu Moussa.

It was the first direct threat by a group to kill Arafat over the pact. Other radicals have said he faces assassination but have stopped short of saying they will kill him themselves.

In Damascus, Ahmed Jibril, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-general command, accused Arafat of selling out Palestinians and said it was "the blackest day" in their history.

"Arafat and his group will be punished by the Palestinian people... a Palestinian child or a Palestinian woman will punish Arafat. He is not worth being killed by a Palestinian man," Fatah uprising said it would discuss forming a tribunal to judge Arafat and his team for recognising "the Zionist entity".

In Amman, Taysir Khaled of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Abdul-Rahim Mallouh of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said they were resigning from the PLO executive committee in protest.

In Tunis, Arafat faced a final hurdle within the PLO's own executive committee to win approval for the self-rule deal, but the margin in his favour might not be convincing.

At the last committee meeting on Thursday, with 12 members present, Arafat had the support of eight plus a proxy vote from a member absent due to illness, PLO sources said.

Rabin signed the letter to Arafat after receiving a letter from the PLO chief in which he recognised the right of Israel to exist, renounced violence and promised to push through amendments to parts of the PLO charter offensive to Israel.

The letter was brought from PLO headquarters in Tunis by Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Joergens Holst, who played a key role in secret Israeli-PLO contacts.

Holst handed the one-page letter in English to Rabin who read it before signing his own

letter to Arafat.

Rabin was also flanked by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who met in secret with PLO officials in Oslo to clinch the accord on recognition and agreement on limited self-rule for Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Rabin said the agreement was only the first step towards a hoped-for comprehensive Middle East peace. "It's only the beginning but a tremendous, important beginning," he added.

"I see in it a big step towards the achievement of these goals knowing that still it's a long way to go with obstacles on the road that we shall have to remove," he said gravely, adding "and it is possible to remove them."

Hundreds of right-wing Israelis and Jewish settlers from the occupied lands massed outside Rabin's office with banners saying "death to traitors" and "Gaza and Jericho today, Jerusalem tomorrow."

Accord will be very difficult to implement, says Kissinger

NEW YORK, Sept 10: Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a veteran of Middle East diplomacy, said today the Israel-PLO accord will be "very difficult to implement", reports Reuters.

"In the short term, the Palestinians gave up a lot," Kissinger said on CBS television, referring to the PLO's recognition of Israel's right to exist, renunciation of violence and promise to amend parts of its charter offensive to Israel.

In the long term, he added, Israel had accepted borders that existed before its victory in the 1967 Middle East war, "which means that when this process is all over... their borders are going to be on the outskirts of their principal cities."

Kissinger, renowned for his tireless shuttle diplomacy in the 1970s, said the US role would be that of mediator. "There's no turning back," he said. "It now has to go forward, and some sort of reconciliation has to evolve out of the relation between these two peoples."

Marcos laid to rest

BATAK, Sept 10: Four years after his death in exile, Ferdinand Marcos was buried Friday, surrounded by thousands of die-hard admirers who blamed his ouster on a US-led conspiracy rather than the alleged corruption and tyranny of his 20-year rule, reports AP.

Following rites of the Philippine Independent Church, the body of the former strongman was placed in a stone mausoleum, which his widow Imelda hopes will serve as a temporary tomb until he can someday be buried in the capital, Manila.

Imelda Marcos, who is famous for her thousands of pairs of shoes, walked barefoot during the ceremony in keeping with Ilocano tradition for widows.

The body will lie inside a glass coffin for public viewing in what the Marcos family hopes will become a shrine for his followers. The glass coffin rests on a black pedestal bathed in light beneath the seal of the presidency and in front of an eternal flame.

Marcos was ousted in the 1986 "people power revolution" and banished to Hawaii, where he died on September 28, 1989. His successor Corason Aquino refused burial here. But her successor Fidel Ramos, a Marcos' cousin, permitted burial in Marcos' home province Ilocos Norte, where he is still revered.



Former first lady Imelda Marcos (2nd L) clutching the Philippine flag as she stands before the bronze coffin bearing the remains of her late husband, former president Ferdinand Marcos, during final burial rites yesterday in his northern hometown. Her daughter Imee Manotoc (2nd R), her son Congressman Ferdinand Marcos Junior (L) and his wife Maria Louise are also seen.

The Midnight File

US invites PLO team

WASHINGTON, Sept 10: The US Embassy in Tunis delivered a White House invitation to the PLO headquarters for a delegation to attend Monday's signing ceremony, said State Department spokesman Michael McCurry. Meanwhile, PLO leaders began meeting in Tunis this evening to decide on the self-rule agreement, report AP, Reuter.

Izetbegovic in S-Arabia

DUBAI, Sept 10: Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic arrived in Jeddah today for talks with Saudi Arabia's King Fahd, Gulf News agencies reported. Izetbegovic arrived from New York, where UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali urged him to resume peace talks which collapsed after Muslims asked for more territory than they were allocated in a proposed peace plan, reports Reuter.

JP (N) fails to name

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mer President and not being sincere about securing his release.

Replying to a question whether they were deserting the JP just as they had deserted the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in 1983, Shamsul Huda Chowdhury said: "No, — we are reorganising the party with the nationalist forces."

"Ershad will remain our leader if he wants to lead us," Huda said. "But we do not believe in the politics of secret letters." (A suggestion that Ershad has been issuing the orders from his prison cell through smuggled epistles.)

"We will try to hold direct talks with the jailed president to know his views," Huda Chowdhury said, adding, "We had joined hands with Ershad because he had promised to run the party with the same ideals of nationalism as those of the BNP."

As an after thought, Huda added that Ershad was a believer in democracy but did not always follow democratic norms because he was misguided by some of his sycophantic aides.

"Those errors of judgement are responsible for the sufferings of Ershad and some other JP men today," he added.

Replying to another question, Shamsul Huda Chowdhury said the 'reorganising move' had no connection with the floating of the Gano Forum by Dr Kamal Hossain. He also ruled out any possible merger of his faction with the ruling BNP.

Claiming to enjoy majority support from the JP men across the country, Huda said most of the 35 JP MPs would join his party ahead of the next elections.

Among others, recently expelled JP secretary of the women's wing Toufika Karim, former MP Hasna Banu Shirin, Maj Gen (Retd) M A Matin, former State Minister T M Giasuddin, Iqbal Hassan Mahmud, MP, Almas Hossain, Principal Abdur Rouf and Golam Bashir sat on the dais with Shamsul Huda and Dr Matin.

A number of former MPs, leaders and workers from different districts were also present at the press conference. They included Selim Sarder, Akteruzzaman, Abdus Sobhan, Mahub Ahmed, Abdul Jalil Prodhan, Major(Retd) Asgar Ali Khan, Abdul Wadud Khan, Moklesur Rahman, Nureh Maksud, Sultana Toura, Nurjahan Kamal, Feroza Zaman, and Mohammad Doula.

Two leading members of the breakaway group — former foreign minister Humayun Rashid Chowdhury and education minister Mahbubur Rahman — were not present at the conference but their conspicuous ab-

sence was not explained by the organisers.

A number of guests from different diplomatic missions were also invited.

In a two-page statement, Shamsul Huda Chowdhury outlined his future plans, including major structural changes in the JP constitution.

In the amended constitution, a bi-cameral parliament and federal system of government will be proposed for the country. The party chief will not be the head of the state, according to their plans.

He said they would hold a grand conference within three months to announce the names of the party leadership.

Huda Chowdhury also said the politics of his faction is not contradictory to the Jatiya Party, rather it is complementary.

"We will make the JP a stronger, mass-oriented party," Huda Chowdhury concluded.

Deja vu ?

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Huda-Matin was inspired by the then Chief Martial Law Administrator HM Ershad who had only months earlier seized power from the BNP through a coup in March 1982. That belief was soon justified when Huda, Matin and their associates joined Ershad in first forming the Janadal and later, the Jatiya Party which was officially launched on January 1, 1986. Matin even became the first secretary general of Ershad's JP.

Again, exactly a decade later, Huda and Matin have chosen to tread a familiar path. Only this time, it is not yet quite clear who or what inspired them to announce the formation of the JP (Nationalist) yesterday at Hotel Sonargang.

Iraq's promise

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 10: Iraq has promised full disclosure of its weapons capability but held back in agreeing to immediate long-term UN monitoring of its future arms potential, diplomats said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Ban on rallies

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Cinema hall on Mirpur Road to Dhanmondi Road No. 16 (old 27), from the crossing of Agargaon link road and Rokeya Sarani to Parjatan crossing on Bijoy Sarani, from the eastern part of Indira Road to western part of Manik Mia Avenue, restricted area of Sangsad Bhavan and all the roads and lanes inside that area.

The restriction will remain effective until the end of the 11th session of the 5th parliament.

Wage increase

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gazetted soon is not just an assurance to the workers that the Wages Commission's commitment will be honoured. It is more than that. It is the statement of a perception that the industrial workers' share in the nation's income should be higher. A corollary of this is that the rest of the country, including the agricultural workers who outnumber their comrades in the factories, should be ready to accept a lower share of the national income.

Turning to the message to the banking sector — "cut lending rates or else" — a desperate attempt to stimulate investment is apparent. It is desperate because in a capital-poor country like Bangladesh, banks need not be lowering price of capital to make investment attractive. The reality is clearly different, indicating that investors do not perceive that return on investment at current interest rates is high enough.

And why so? Because costs are high. With a liberal trade regime manufacturers have to work with their price set in the international market. The only way in which they can make profit is by having units cost which is lower than unit price.

Given the labour intensity in the technology that Bangladesh's industrial sector uses, wage cost is a major share of unit cost. If workers base salary gets pushed up by 35 per cent in one go the effect on wage cost and, through it, on profitability and viability of industries has to be ruinous. This can hardly be reversed by a cut in the lending rates by a few percentage points.

Convertibility

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sources said. Although the country has a formidable reserve of foreign exchange, the reserve is not at all sustainable, the sources said, arguing that the country may soon face a severe capital outflow because of low interest rate on bank deposits. The foreign exchange brokers may speculate by stockholding and later releasing their forex at a premium, they said.

The situation is likely to put pressure on the local currency which may lead to its substantial depreciation. The fallout would mean a sharp rise in the prices of commodities, the sources said.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a high official of a nationalised commercial bank said the government should be more cautious in deregulating the exchange market by taking more time for the entire process. Any hasty move may adversely affect the whole economy, he said.

He also said that inclusion of the brokers, authorised money changers and the exporters in the market, at the initial stage, would hinder the smooth functioning of the market forces.

The official also informed this correspondent that a draft of the code of conduct for the exchange market has already been prepared by a technical committee, which would help bring discipline in the market. But this code would have little control over the brokers of forex and the other unauthorised dealers, he said.