

DOWN TO EARTH

Faulty Buildings and Adulteration in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

There are two kinds of buildings in the city which pose a threat to their occupants and their neighbours. One is the large number of old and dilapidated buildings in the old part of the city and the other is the many new houses built on weak and unstable foundations in the new part.

The old and dilapidated buildings in the old part of the city were built during the British period. Some of them are so decrepit that one may wonder how they can still stand. There is the risk of their collapsing at any moment. The occupants of these houses do not seem to care about their safety. Mostly they are poor people who are compelled to live with the risk, because such houses are their only shelters.

The Rajdhaní Unnayan Kartipakkha (RAJUK) have a duty to look into the matter. In fact, there is an urgent need to declare these houses as unfit for human habitation. If, despite such declaration, they fail to vacate them or their owners induct tenants in them, the RAJUK should take legal steps to prosecute them. At the same time, steps should be taken to pull down such dilapidated structures before they collapse causing loss of human life.

Another source of danger stems from the recent trend of construction in many new areas of the city on weak and unstable foundations. In the hectic pace of activities for new constructions, many low-lying areas and ditches have been selected as sites for construction without proper examination of their suitability.

Even during the process of construction, no care is taken for durable foundation by way of piling or other methods. As a result, there have been some cases of house collapse in some new areas of the city, for example at Mohakhali and Bashabo.

In view of the fast growing population in the city, the demand for housing has increased phenomenally. Taking advantage of this fast rising demand, some persons bent on quick profit have been building houses with house building loans on unsuitable sites acquired by them at low price. Such sites are not properly filled up or compacted before starting construction. Owners of such lands, in most cases, do not engage any engineer or architect to supervise the construction work. As a result, serious defects remain in the construction process. On the other hand, RAJUK and the loan-giving agency who have also an obligation to conduct from time to time inspection of the progress of construction, fail in their duty in many cases. When, as a result of manifold defects and weaknesses, the houses become liable to collapse, the loan-giving agencies and the thoughtless owners stand to suffer losses.

In spite of the existence of RAJUK, the city presents a glaring example of unplanned development. Though there are few wide roads, many high-rise buildings are coming along narrow streets in many areas. The situation is such that in case of medical emergencies, no ambulance will be able to pass through these narrow

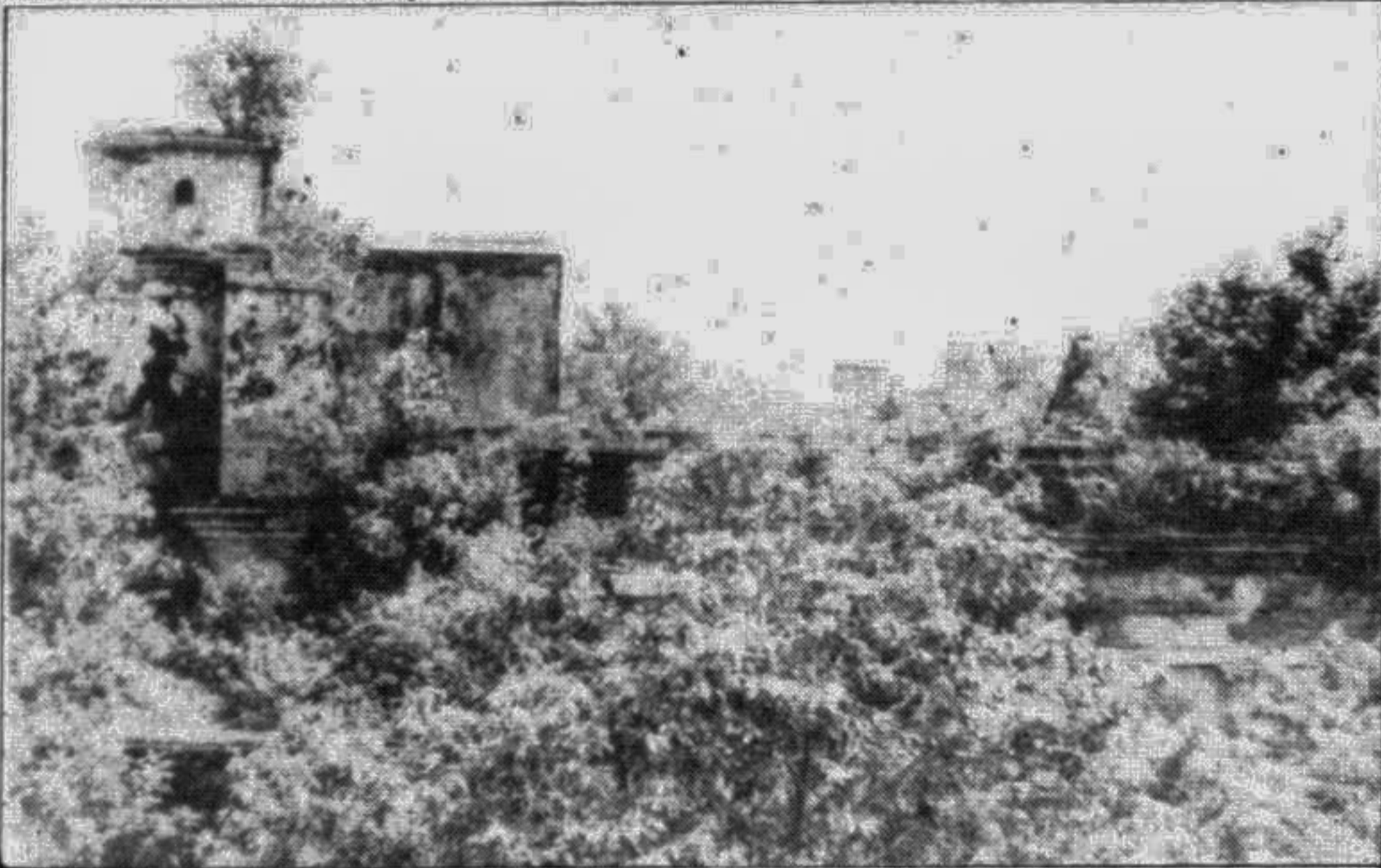
streets to reach help to those in need. The role of RAJUK in this respect is far from satisfactory.

It behoves the Ministry of Works and the RAJUK to look into the problems of dilapidated and defective houses in the city to pave the way for orderly development.

The incidence of adulteration not only of foodstuffs and medicines but also in every conceivable area of consumption has increased in the city to an alarming extent. The adulteration techniques have been found to take ingenious forms. For example, one cannot be sure when one buys a green coconut that the liquid inside is genuine coconut milk. When it is opened up, one may find plain water. Clever vendors devise a way of drawing out the milk by means of a thin needle and inject water into it in the same way. The unwary customer finds no sign to detect the deception.

The same is with cow's milk. Nowadays it is almost impossible to obtain unadulterated milk anywhere. Milk powder is also no longer dependable for purity. The powder arrives from exporting countries in large containers, and when it is packed in tins for sale, chalk or flour is said to be added.

No one seems to care that the right to pure food and drink is the most basic of basic rights. In view of the large-scale adulteration practised in various foods, observers suggest that setting up of an effective Food Administration body on the lines of the Drug Administration is called for.



Yeltsin orders security forces

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Heightening the tone of the three-day-old confrontation between Yeltsin's government and anti-reform conservatives, Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin warned Friday that the country was 'at the brink' and that any mistake could result in a catastrophe, Itar-Tass said.

But Yeltsin stepped in quickly to counter concerns that plans were underway to attack parliament, known as the 'White House'.

'No one has used force against the White House and no one will,' Yeltsin said as he attended a meeting of fellow leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Itar-Tass reported.

Yeltsin's statement of reassurance came after the Kremlin ordered the Defence and Interior ministries to take urgent measures to confiscate firearms from those persons taking part in the protection of the parliament.

The order made the 2,500-strong parliamentary guard subordinate to the Interior Ministry but was also directed at volunteer brigades outside the building.

The Russian leader issued the order after nine armed men led by Terekhov attacked CIS military headquarters in a clash that killed one police officer and one woman bystander.

The incident marked the first bloodshed in the capital since Yeltsin decided Tuesday to dissolve Parliament and call elections to a new post-Soviet legislature.

One Defence official, Deputy Defence Minister Konstantin Kobets, said he had ordered his forces 'to shoot to kill' in case of a new attack, while Defence Minister Pavel Grachev said automatic weapons had been given to the police defending

military buildings.

Yeltsin sent his condolences to the family of the two victims while his press service described the attack as an impudent action of extremists encouraged by the leadership of the dissolved Supreme Soviet.

Thousands of anti-Yeltsin protesters meanwhile remained outside the parliament, vowing to resist the order to dissolve the communist-era parliament and defend the building where Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov and Vice President Alexander Rutskoi were holed up.

Kremlin officials said Thursday that firearms were being distributed to people in front of the parliament and warned of the possible violence.

Vyacheslav Kulyasov, a Defence official appointed by parliament, was quoted by Itar-Tass as saying that White House guards were defying Yeltsin's order to disarm and had placed their weapons in an easily-accessible room.

Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov meanwhile announced at a news conference that security was being increased at railway stations and airports in the capital and that the vicinity surrounding the parliament White House building was declared a 'danger zone'.

Grachev said there was no question of calling in the army to defend military installations, but admitted supplementary troops had been brought into the capital to protect the city's residents, Itar-Tass said.

A member of parliament claimed earlier that the Kremlin had issued an ultimatum to deputies to evacuate the building by early Saturday or face forced eviction, but Kremlin spokesman Anatoly Kravitskov denied any such warning had been issued.

Earlier the Congress of People's Deputies voted over-

whelmingly Thursday to suspend the powers of President Yeltsin and to confirm Vice President Alexander Rutskoi as acting head of state.

The 636-to-2 vote against Yeltsin and a 635-to-3 vote confirming Rutskoi came as the Congress - Russia's supreme legislative body - met in an emergency session with an attendance smaller than the normal quorum.

The government warned earlier that the Congress meeting would yield 'Only one option: War.'

The Kremlin on Thursday repeated that the Congress had been 'terminated,' and the vote was 'likely to have little more than symbolic value for the opposition.'

In the Congress, Parliament Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov and Rutskoi gave lengthy speeches denouncing Yeltsin's administration as a 'dictatorship' that was seeking to avoid responsibility for its economic failures.

Yeltsin's actions were aimed at 'allowing those enriched by the shadow economy to continue rolling in luxury,' Khasbulatov said, accusing the President of concentrating 'Tyrannical power' in his hands.

'The Yeltsin regime is built on lies and adventurism,' he charged. 'The country is on the verge of civil war.'

Rutskoi claimed that 'forces abroad which assisted in the destruction of the Soviet Union are today helping Yeltsin in the destruction of Russia.'

He chastised deputies who had abandoned the parliament and switched to Yeltsin's side, asserting to loud applause that 'they will repent.'

Italian newsmen observe strike

ROME, Sept 24: Newspaper presses shut down and television news aired without video footage Friday as journalists across Italy staged a one-day strike to protest a government demand for union funds. Saturday editions of newspapers were not published and news casters read the report on television without graphics or video, reports AP.



Fireworks above the Opera House in Sydney as the International Olympic Committee President Juan Samaranch announced Thursday that Sydney would host the 2000 Olympic Games. — AFP photo

No power can take away Kashmir: Rao

NEW DELHI, Sept 24: Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, today squarely blamed Islamabad for the growing tension between India and Pakistan and asserted that 'no power on the earth could take away Kashmir from us,' reports PTI.

Addressing an Indian Youth Congress-I rally here at the historic Red Fort, the Prime Minister said 'We want to reduce the tension but Pakistan does not.'

Charging the neighbouring country with aiding and abetting terrorism from across the border, the Prime Minister said that it was openly sending trained militants with arms and ammunition to create problems in the valley.

There should be no confusion or doubt in the minds of all those instigating violence in Kashmir that they would be able to snatch away the valley

through terrorism, Rao said. The only way out to face the challenge posed by the disruptive forces was the mobilisation of the youth in which he had tremendous faith, the Prime Minister said.

'I do not see any other way to counter these forces,' Rao told the cheering Youth Congress-I workers from his bullet-proof podium amid tight security arrangements.

Armed policemen and men from the security agencies had been posted at the venue since early morning to keep a close watch from all vantage points.

'Kashmir is an integral part of India and will remain so forever. No power on the earth can separate the valley from us,' the Prime Minister said, adding that thousands of youth were ready to sacrifice their lives to maintain the country's unity.

Authority dispels doubt

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correct and misleading saying that there was no reason why it should reach one billion dollars as all the physical and price contingencies have been included in the total cost estimate of 690 million US dollars.

Regarding the controversy raised by the newspaper about the benefit of a barrage and the Jamuna bridge itself, he said that it was too late to introduce such controversy since the government had spent a large sum for bringing the project to its present stage. Creating such controversy at this final stage of the project would rather go against the interest of the country, he warned.

This is only a ploy of the vested quarters who do not want this vital and infrastructure project to be implemented,' the Executive Director of the bridge authority said.

He also said that the project was certainly not a non-productive one as claimed by the reports. Rather it would be the

most important infrastructure project in Bangladesh yielding numerous benefits to the country, particularly to the North Bengal.

'What is unique and most important in this project is that everyone wants the proposed bridge including those who will be losing their lands to the project, because everybody is convinced of the need and the benefits it will bring to the country,' Mohammad Ali said.

'We are absolutely sure that this project will bring immense benefits to the people of North Bengal and to the economy as a whole by removing the physical barrier between two parts of the country by tremendously improving the transport and power transmission network,' he maintained.

The press conference held at the office of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority (JUMBA) yesterday evening was also attended by its Chief Engineer Abdul Matin and other senior officials.

Dr Kamal visits RU

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sphere in the educational institutions is the duty of the Education Minister,' Dr Kamal said. 'These duties are imposed by the Constitution. But they have failed to perform their duties and the Constitution has been violated.'

Demanding ban on the politics of Jamaat-Shibir, Dr Kamal accused the fundamentalist and communal Jamaat-Shibir of using violence as a tool of their 'so-called' politics. They were cutting tendons, setting fire to dormitories and killing students in a planned way.

'Those who are bent on destroying the civilisation in medieval style have no right to do politics in a democratic society,' he said.

The Gano Forum president alleged that the Jamaat-Shibir forces were trying to strike a blow to the very existence of Independent Bangladesh taking revenge of their defeat in '71.

He called on the government to ban the politics of Jamaat-Shibir to protect the Constitution, save the civilisation and ensure congenial academic atmosphere.

He also suggested that Parliament should take a resolution to free the campuses

from arms and violence. 'If anybody opposes the resolution, we want to know his identity.'

Dr Kamal bitterly criticised the law enforcing agencies for what he called their inaction during the killing and widespread violence in the Rajshahi University on Sunday.

'A tense situation was prevailing in the Rajshahi city following an earlier incident in the Rajshahi Medical College but the police did not take any step to avoid violence in the university campus,' he said.

He also accused the university authorities of failure to provide security to the students although they were taking fees from students on security head.

Dr Kamal said the political parties should not have any student wing and urged the country's political parties not to use students for political purposes.

'The abuse of students is a serious crime,' he said.

Party leaders Barrister Amirul Islam, Advocate Zahirul Islam, Begum Nurjahan Murshid, Abul Mal Abdul Muhiit, Enayetur Rahman, Engineer Abul Kashem, Rabeya Siraj were, among others, present at the press conference.

Khaleda

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The BNP chairperson laid stress on strengthening the party asking its leaders and workers to hold frequent rallies in districts and thanas to make the people know about the government's development programmes and the motive of the opposition's action programmes.

She said the BNP enjoys a huge popularity and added this popularity could be utilised by strengthening the party and smoothly implementing people-oriented programmes.

Referring to the frequent opposition's agitation programmes, she said the opposition's attempts to create disorder and chaos could be foiled by organising and activating the party.

Contaminated milk

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on September 12 which followed the showcase reply submitted by the importer.

Customs officials impounded the milk imported from Holland last month by the Bangladesh Trading Agency, located in Mouli Bazar Dhaka in 4000 gunny bags, after detection of a high degree of radioactivity.

The level of radioactivity was found at 497 BQ (Becquerell) per kilogram, exceeding the permissible limit of 95 BQ per kg, officials said.

Since the detection of radioactive contamination the containers carrying the milk were isolated and kept under strict security at the jetty shed.

The level of radioactivity in the said milk was detected in the radiation testing laboratories of Atomic Energy Commission both in Chittagong and Dhaka.

Following the detection, the Customs authority issued a 'showcase' notice to the importer.

But the importer in a bid to release the consignment appealed to the Commerce Ministry for retesting the impounded milk. The prayer, however, was rejected immediately.

Sihanouk

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monarch two decades after he was toppled in a 1970 coup. Sihanouk signed the document Friday morning in a chandelier-lit palace hall before the newly elected National Assembly who adopted it.

He was named king Friday night and his consort, Monique, took the title of queen after their election by a council of senior statesmen and monks.

Dressed in the traditional royal outfit - a long-sleeved, gold-buttoned white top, and purple, knee-length silk pants worn over black stockings - Sihanouk took his own oath of office before the 120 members of the national assembly and invited guests, and afterwards received in turn an oath of allegiance.

BNP: Nizami

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Referring to the discussion on the Rajshahi University incident in Parliament on September 20, Nizami said, 'It was an Eid festival of the Awami League and the BNP. These parties wanted a dead body for the celebration.'

Nizami, also the leader of the Jamaat Parliamentary Party, criticised Deputy Leader of the House Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury for his remarks in Parliament that there is no constitutional bar to ban the parties which are doing politics in the name of religion.

The Jamaat leader claimed that they had a pre-election understanding with the BNP, but after coming to power it betrayed with the Jamaat by not restoring the citizenship of Prof. Golam Azam.

The Jamaat secretary general blamed the ruling party for unleashing terrorism in the country and urged the people who voted for the BNP in last parliamentary election to withdraw their support from it and rally round the banner of the Jamaat.

The meeting organised by the city unit of the Jamaat was addressed, among others, by Maulana Abdus Sobhan MP.

Foreign buyers

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buyers would have been active in the market throughout the week.

Meanwhile, the illiquid shares pushed up the price index in the market despite normal trading, brokers said. The investors got erroneous indications because of such trading.

Last week, shares of Bangladesh Leaf Tobacco Company (BLTC), dubbed as illiquid by traders, witnessed a sharp jump to Tk 800 per share on September 18 from its previous rate of Tk 615.

Brokers claimed that over half of the shares in the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) are now illiquid and traded rarely resulting in the squeeze in shares on sale.

Meanwhile, DSC authorities already have proposals for making different boards for liquid and illiquid shares. 'This would reflect the market position clearly,' DSE sources said. But decisions on separate boards have not yet been taken.

The Midnight File

Major attack against Georgian defenders in Sukhumi

TBILISI (Georgia), Sept 24: The fate of the Black Sea city of Sukhumi hung in the balance today as Abkhazian rebels battled Georgian defenders in the streets after launching a major offensive. Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze, speaking from a bunker in the besieged city as battles raged around him, said only total mobilisation of the Georgian people and the arrival of reinforcements from the south could stop the city being overrun, reports Reuters.

Mandela's plea to lift sanctions

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 24: African National Congress President Nelson Mandela on Friday asked the world community to lift all economic and diplomatic sanctions against South Africa. Mandela's appeal, in a UN speech, came a day after South Africa's parliament approved the creation of a transitional council representing all race groups to help run the country until the nation's first multiracial election, scheduled for April 27. 'We believe the time has come when the international community should lift all economic sanctions against South Africa,' Mandela said, reports AP.

24 killed in Kashmir violence

SRINAGAR (India), Sept 24: At least 24 more people died in overnight violence in Kashmir, as police planned the release of more than 300 Muslim rebels in a goodwill gesture in the northern Indian state, officers said here today. Nineteen guerrillas died since Thursday night in separate clashes with Indian security forces across Kashmir, officers said, adding four civilians and a trooper were among the 24 killed in the unabated political violence.

Meanwhile, Indian troops detaining an unspecified number of suspected rebels, have decided to set free a total of 317 militants Thursday as an expression of goodwill to the Kashmiri people, Bedi told reporters here, says AFP.

Pragati Insurance

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three years of its formation. Subsequently, in January 1992 the CCI also granted permission to Pragati to issue an additional 10,000 shares of Tk 100 each at the same earlier ratio for the sponsors and the general public.

Reacting on the SEC decision rejecting the appeal, the Managing Director of Pragati A K M Rafiqul Islam said 'We have adhered to all relevant regulations and have never deviated from it, but what provoked the cancellation once the permission was given to float public shares at a premium is not understandable to me.'

Saying that this step by the SEC would 'act as a hindrance' to the development of the capital market, he added 'It has created a lot of bad publicity for us in the market which we did not deserve.'

He said the company's Board of Directors are scheduled to meet on Sunday next to discuss recent development and to chalk out future action. The company has the option to move the High Court to challenge the SEC order.

However, the SEC Chairman disagreed with the notion that the action would have a negative impact on the capital market. 'On the contrary, the action of the SEC would build up public confidence as the ordinary investors would get the feeling that there is a regulatory institution with the duty and responsibility to protect their legitimate interest,' Khan told The Daily Star.

Therefore, he added, instead of having any adverse impact on the securities market the action of the SEC would serve as an encouragement in creating vitality and confidence in the market.

At the hearing on the appeal the Pragati representatives contended that it was illegal to refuse or revoke the permission as the bar on the sale of premium shares was removed through a gazette notification in 1991.

Revocation after the permission was granted, they said, contravened the principles of promissory estoppel and also violated the principles of natural justice.

Pragati contended that there is no law which stipulates that the shares are to be sold to the sponsors and the public at the same price.

The company representatives also argued that the sponsors having built up the company, it is only befitting that the new shareholders should pay the premium, which could be utilised for protecting the policy holders.

The objections raised by the Controller of Insurance against allowing Pragati to float public shares at a premium included violation of the insurance rules, which stipulated that the Tk six crore paid up capital would be subscribed by the sponsors and the public equally at par value and on the same terms.

The Controller of Insurance also noted that in addition to the Tk three crore paid up capital subscribed by the sponsors, the Managing Director was issued 5,000 shares at par value, which he was not entitled to as he was not a sponsor, and termed it as illegal and in violation of the Insurance Act of 1938 and Insurance Rules of 1958.

Nepal team

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Deuja of United Marxist Leninist Party (UML), Barman Budha from United People's Front, Prakash Chandra Lohani from the National Democratic Party (NDP), Jeevan Lal Satyal, Secretary General of Parliament and Krishana Kumar Pandey, Under Secretary, Parliament Secretariat.

He also pointed out that there was no reason or justification for issuing shares to the public at a premium and that four other insurance companies previously issued public shares at par value of Tk 100 each and in future 13 others would have to sell at par.

In rejecting the appeal the SEC noted that it could not get a 'satisfactory reply' from the Pragati representatives, about specific queries on the necessity or justification for offering public shares at a premium and as to what prejudice or loss the company would suffer if the shares were sold at par.

It also took the company to task for failing to float shares within the stipulated three-year period saying that the delay deprived the public their legal right to participate in the company business and their share of the dividends.

The Commission also refuted the contention that the sponsors deserved to sell the shares at a premium to revive a fair return on their investments and sacrifice while noting that the sponsors did get a fair return on their investments through the dividends during the past six years.

The contention that the premium sale is to protect the interest of policy holders, the SEC said, is outrageous and is difficult to accept as it would imply that their interest have not been protected earlier. Furthermore, it asked, why should the public shareholder pay for such protection?

The Commission also said the practice of selling shares to the Managing Director at par value while seeking to sell shares to the public at a premium tantamounts to 'insider trading in securities', which the SEC is duty-bound to prohibit.

The principles of natural justice was not violated, the SEC pointed out, as Pragati had the opportunity to respond to the issues raised by the Controller of Insurance.

The question of estoppel does not arise, the Commission said, as shares were sold and Pragati had not suffered any detriment.

Imelda jailed

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cos Not Guilty,' surged forward toward the gates of the court when they heard the verdict over a loudspeaker.

'God knows and we all know that Imelda committed no crime. That's the truth,' said a Marcos supporter, Nita Mediona.

Earlier, a few dozen supporters of former President Corazon Aquino also picketed the area and were chased away by the Marcos loyalists when they unfurled a banner saying 'Return Stolen Wealth.'

Mrs Marcos was acquitted of federal racketeering charges by a US District Court in Manhattan in 1990. She faces 89 civil and criminal cases in the Philippines.

A popular revolt led to her husband's ouster in 1986 and to Mrs Aquino's installation as president. Marcos died in exile in Hawaii in 1989.

After hearing the verdict, Mrs Marcos left the courthouse in a white limousine to the cheers of her followers. She drove to a nearby church, where she walked down the aisle to the altar on her knees. She kissed the base of the altar and an image of an infant Jesus.

During her husband's rule, Mrs Marcos built an image as a jet-setter fond of shopping sprees at some of the world's smartest salons. She left behind 1,200 pairs of shoes when she and her husband fled to Hawaii in 1986.

Mrs Marcos returned here in November 1991 and ran unsuccessfully for president last year.

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