

Government should come hard on culprits

There is brazen-facedness not only about the manner in which it happened but also the way it has been handled at the fall-out stages. The murderous assault of trigger-happy goons, gone livid with a defeat-demurring anger, upon victory celebrations of the newly elected AL ward commissioner at Nawabganj read like an open book — in its origin as well as in the knowledge of who perpetrated it.

And, no political party worth the salt, particularly when it is the ruling one, can own them, think of associating with what happened. Given the dastardliness of the act, unleashed in open disregard of minimum civilised norms, where the sullen were carrying lethal weapons in public view and even a couple of sitting ducks on a rooftop fell to their bullets, it was more than remorse that the citizens expected from the government political leaders. But even remorse went by an unintended default as the sequence of responses proved. Most people felt they have been given a ride through gullibility they were too much in the know of things to accept.

It is hardly expected from this government that it should have fallen for the old pattern of things that we regard as a closed, discredited chapter. What then has changed? Why did the Press Note have to gloss over what was an attack and term it as 'clashes' and the official media were obliged to project it as such. This slant must prove counterproductive on two counts: it has militated against the right to know in a matter of grave public concern; and two, it gave a wrong signal to the perpetrators and even the law enforcers — those in the first category feeling shielded in wrong-doing while the law-men felt unnecessarily circumscribed.

The persistent charges of rigging and counter-rigging have been an incitement to trouble. Our point is why not leave it to the Election Commission to deal with, if, and after, the complaints have been filed with that statutory authority. Meanwhile accept the defeat or victory in as good a grace or magnanimity respectively, as you are capable of, without making any incendiary issue of it. But at the same time, why infringe on a party's right to celebrate a victory while a defeat is quietly evaluated at the other camp. Have respect for popular verdict.

About unnecessarily fuelling the fire we wouldn't mince words to put a question here: why the ruling party's ministers chose to visit the victims at the DMCH so closely on the heels of the carnage? At any rate, given their expected maturity, how could they be so naive to think it would not invite some fresh trouble?

The suddenness of the brush-fire may have been unanticipated. But if police and BDR had accompanied the victory procession, rather than being rushed to attend to the mayhem, post-haste, their timely presence could have prevented the dastardly incident.

A murder case has been filed, visits paid to the victims and a strong resolve expressed to catch and punish the culprits. Everything in the book has been done so far, including some arrests. But unless the government does really something, rising above party affiliation, and out of the ordinary, by meting out the severest punishment to the killers, its legal, we dare say, political, obligations will not be met. It is also easily done because the perpetrators are not dark horses — they are very much known.

Heroic death of a unique man

Today is the fourth anniversary of a most heroic death draped by colours of far-influencing national import. General Ershad's autocratic rule had hit lurid levels of corruption corroding the citizen's many freedoms into worse than a skeleton and pushing the future of the nation on to an irrecoverable course. Society had already had too much of that all-pervading rot made the more stinking by the shameless gloss with which the electronic as also the print media projected the trinity of the emperor, empress and prince. It was waiting for something that could precipitate his plunge into doom. Qamrul Hassan's death worked that spark.

It was the closing night's session of the Jatiya Kavita Utsav, introduced by the nation's poets headed by Shamsur Rahman specifically to fight autocracy and take on Ershad frontally. Qamrul Hassan was presiding. At the end of the proceedings, the nation's most eminent painter, had a massive heart attack and died on the shoulders of Sheikh Hasina helping him to a transport on way to hospital. The painter had, before the attack, hardly finished a biting caricature of the autocrat captioned uniquely by him — *Desh Aaj Bisuhabeahayr Khapporey*. By the end of that night more than a hundred thousand posters were printed out of that to be distributed throughout the nation. By the end of the week every family, committed to the overthrow of autocracy, had one *Bishuabeahaya* poster hanging from the wall.

By now Qamrul Hassan has very deservedly been recognised as the nation's second most important personality in the visual arts after the legendary Zainul. But his equally, if not more, important contribution to the undoing and defeat of Pakistan as also to the fall of Ershad, in particular terms, and generally to the struggle against communalism and bigotry of every kind, has not been appreciated in a manner reflecting the nation's true debts to him.

Qamrul Hassan's caricature of the Pakistani demon during the Liberation War remains a supreme creation of patriotism. But his contribution to textile design as the founder chief of the Design Centre is not known to many. A disciple of the incomparable Gurusaday Dutta, he was the best *Bratochari* dancer in the two Bengals and an immaculate performer on the Santal drum, *madol*. His last act of going to the masses involved a gigantic attempt to revive the *Bratochari* as a popular nation-building movement. Before that he had already declared himself a *patua*, the traditional village picture-maker, rather than a painter.

His graduation into a very special kind of colourist, using the primaries so loved by our village painters, as also his breaking into forms neither tending towards modern western distortions nor beholden to influences of Zainul, places him on an enviable high niche in the history of our arts. He was besides a champion boxer and body-builder on the all-Bengal level. There wouldn't be another like him.

A boat lazily took me across the serene Narmada, larger than its old size. Even the incomplete dam had at one time caught enough water to submerge a temple that showed up now from stem to stern. The ascent to village Manibelli begins from the dock, near the temple.

This is the village where the police has used lathis mercilessly many a time to clear the people before the impounded Narmada water would inundate them. Some 55 men, women and children are still perched on a height, determined not to quit. They are safe till probably next June when the dam, already 69 metres high, despite assurances to the contrary, would have risen to 80 metres as the Gujarat chief minister claimed the other day. (The full height will be 140 metres).

Along the Narmada, I visited one more habitation, Vadgam, not more than a cluster of a few huts, one of the last posts of resistance. The people, 30 families, are uncertain about their future but they feel justified in not having moved because a few of those who had gone to the alternative sites have returned, the finding new surroundings unfamiliar and inadequate.

Some human rights activists and I took a four-day journey to see the places, where the people were still living, resisting the pressure and the prize offered by the authorities, and where the oustees had been rehabilitated. There is no doubt that the life is picking up in new colonies, although the tales of hardship are unending.

I wish nobody would have to leave his or her hearth. New places, whatever the facilities, cannot compensate the loss of

The Two Dams: Two Agitations

Already rich farmers, with their political clout, are programming the Narmada water for 10 new sugarcane factories in northern Gujarat, which is already wealthy. Even the name of Sanat Mehta, head of the Narmada project, is connected with one sugar plant.

neighbourhood, friends and the living itself. But then people all over the world have been shifted from their homes — some because of a dam that has been built, some because of a factory that has come up and some because of a country's boundary that has changed. None of them has liked the uprooting but after some time they have taken life in their stride. But many like the Narmada *Bachao Andolan* votaries, led by Medha Pankhar, are conscientious objectors, against the very project that disturbs the lives of lakhs — and environments.

Whether Narmada should have been dammed or not is not the debate I want to revive. I have listened to those who oppose the dam in any shape or form and those who swear by it. Both get worked up soon. Both seem to imagine that a stand can only be defended by the language of violence and by condemning those who do not accept their point of view. For both of them there are no shades. There is only dam or no dam, black or white.

I want to concentrate on the fallout, the rehabilitation part. That is the reason why some of us went to Gujarat, to see where the uprooted have re-struck the roots. Some 6,500 families out of 41,000 have been rehabilitated, according to official sources. Medha's supporters put the figure of the affected at two lakh families (10

lakh people). The estimate by the Gujarat non-government organisations (NGOs) and the Sarvodaya workers is, however, far less, around 50,000 families. Despite certain drawbacks, the work on the Gujarat side is going apace. A five-acre plot of land is being allotted to every adult, plus money for bullocks and rehabilitation. Both Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, particularly the latter, are far behind. Maharashtra is trying

logues. I found the promise of rehabilitation firmer than before following prime minister Narasimha Rao's meeting with chief ministers of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

I would like New Delhi to go further and ensure that the impounded Narmada water at Sardar Sarovar is primarily used in Saurashtra and the Kutch, where the parched throats are more needy than the

ern Gujarat. The state chief minister has told them that it is not constitutionally possible. But after checking with experts in Delhi, I find it can be done.

"We shall not be a party to the kuliks cornering the gains," say the Gujarat NGOs. "If we fail, we shall be the first to join Medha." The Citizens for Democracy (CFD), a human rights organisation, vainly tried to get the two at the same platform to harness their efforts to fight the poachers, those who want to appropriate the water even before it reaches Rajkot, from where the need begins.

Strange as it may sound, the main agitation over another dam, the one at Tehri, is on rehabilitation. The affected people, nearly one lakh, would feel satisfied if the terms of resettlement to the Narmada oustees were applicable to them, that is, five acres for every adult. (They have been promised two acres per family).

Sunderlal Bahuguna, who has been leading the agitation at Tehri is not reconciled to the dam which, he believes, is being built in a seismic area. "If ever the earthquake destroys the dam, the area up to Bulamsahar, 75 miles away, will be submerged," says Bahuguna.

Unlike the Narmada where the dam is nearly half built, the foundation of Tehri dam is yet to be laid. However, both dams have suffered a setback: the

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

to clear the Taloda forest where 26 lakh trees would have to be cut.

However, Gujarat is responsible for the settlement of all oustees, whether they live in Maharashtra or Madhya Pradesh. The Narmada Tribunal Award has made it clear and none in Gujarat has challenged this.

The government does not have land even to resettle the affected in Gujarat alone, how are they talking about the ones in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh? The non-dam votaries told me. They may be right but why not to call the bluff instead of dwelling on the wrongs of the dam? I did not get a satisfactory answer from the *Andolan* ide-

parched lands. Perhaps an express canal can be built to take water straight to southern Gujarat. This may be difficult to implement politically but, if done, it would assuage many objections.

Already rich farmers, with their political clout, are programming the Narmada water for 10 new sugarcane factories in northern Gujarat, which is already wealthy. Even the name of Sanat Mehta, head of the Narmada project, is connected with one sugar plant.

The Gujarat NGOs are unhappy over the meagre share for distant areas in Saurashtra (9.5 per cent) and the Kutch (1.5 per cent). They want a legislation to stop the use of water in north-

Tehri because the financier, the Soviet Union, has collapsed and the Narmada because the World Bank has stopped the aid.

The two dams also tell the story of two agitations and their leaders. Medha has been able to harness international opinion and has no dearth of attention in India. She has a large number of workers and sympathisers. She has even forced the central government to review the Narmada project and the prime minister to have another look at the rehabilitation. Bahuguna is essentially a one-man show. Whenever he wanted to draw media attention, he has travelled all the way from Tehri to Delhi to do so. He says his struggle is 'spiritual'.

The prime minister does not even acknowledge his letters. In fact, he is known more as a person who has agitated to stop the felling of trees than as an objector of the dam. Medha, too, complains that the prime minister has never met her, not even replied to her letters.

Traversing different ways, the two are converging at the same point. Bahuguna says: "Due to indifference of Delhi our efforts of non-violent defence are eroded." Medha also says that the government's obduracy is telling upon the people's patience and they are desperate. Bahuguna fears that the militants may take over. Medha already sees the making of a violent resistance.

The first village, Manibelli, which the authorities tried to vacate nearly a year ago, saw the people fighting for their homes. The Tehri oustees are still talking to the authorities. But both are determined to have a place in the sun, whatever the cost.

It was not mere homesickness that Filipino national Lenny Tolentino felt when she first arrived in Japan five years ago.

Indeed, in a country that credits its homogeneity for its economic success, foreigners like Tolentino were often unwelcome.

"For almost two years, I felt an outcast," she says. "Every one around me looked and talked Japanese. As a foreigner, it was almost impossible to find a close friend."

All that seems to be changing, Tolentino, who works for a Catholic church organisation that gives support illegal workers in Japan, points to a recent concert here as evidence of a subtle transformation in the Japanese attitude toward foreigners.

The concert focused on discrimination faced by Asians in Japan. "But we were surprised to find the packed audience consisted of more Japanese than foreigners."

Other Asians living here tell similar stories. And now some observers say many of the stiff barriers that have kept Japan closed to foreigners and alien influences may finally be showing cracks.

Japan: Foreigners Feel More Welcome

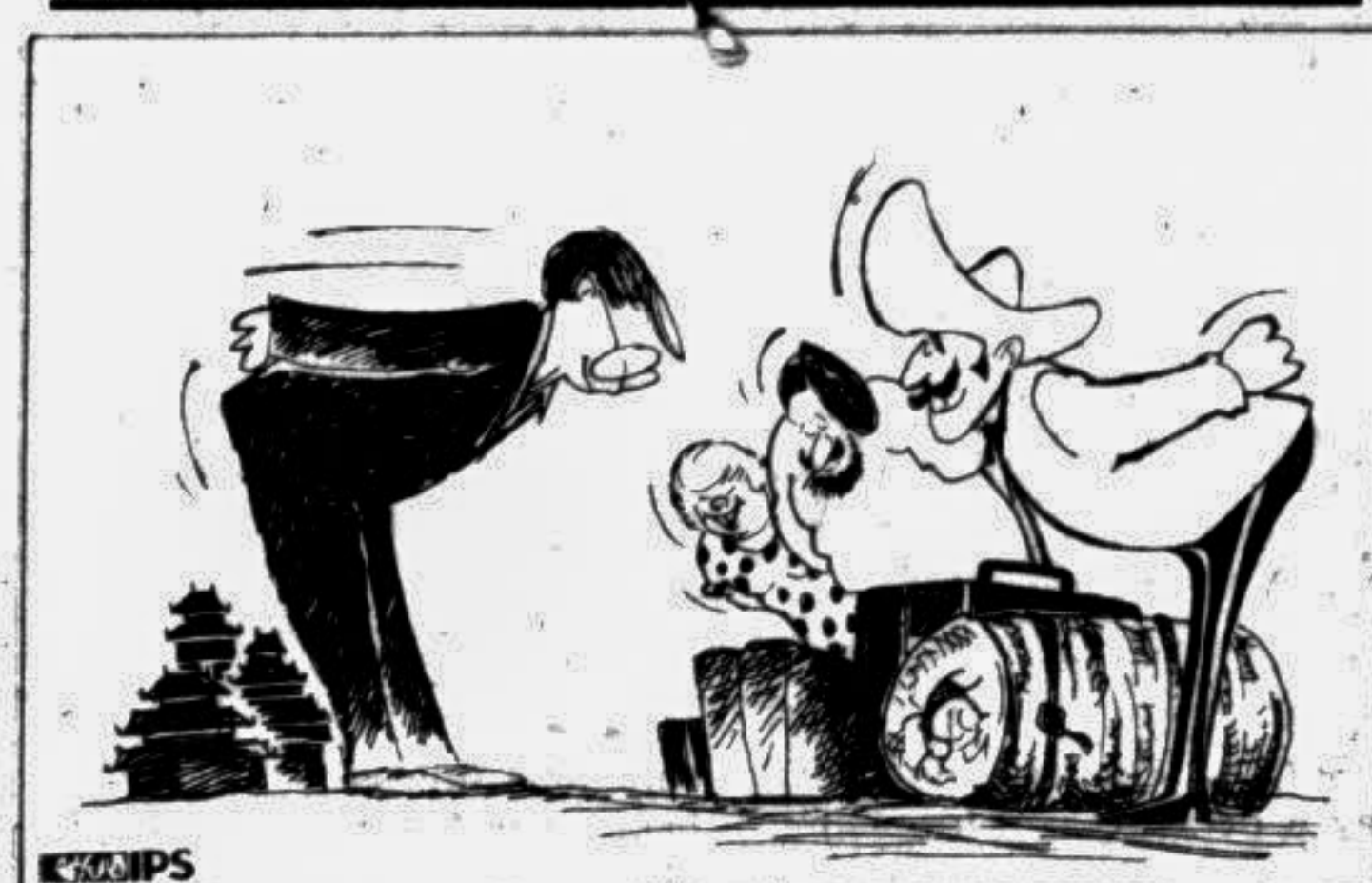
While Asian residents are still a long way from being treated as equals in Japanese society, there is no denying these people have gained a certain respect," says Japanese social worker Kengo Kobayashi. Japan's booming economy in the late '80s had offered lucrative jobs to thousands of illegal workers from abroad — most of them from South and South-east Asia and Latin America.

Reaching as much as 500,000 in number, these workers settled down on the outskirts of Japan's major cities, where they worked in factories, construction sites and farms.

But the new migrants soon learned they could expect no difference in treatment from that given to the country's Korean settlers, who had been forced for generations to think and act Japanese.

Most of the newcomers' employers and neighbours spoke only Japanese, and had never communicated with other nationalities before — and could not care less about

There is a new tolerance towards foreigners in Japan that could point towards a more heterogeneous Japan in future. *Suvendri Kakuchi* of Inter Press Service reports from Tokyo.



them. Says one Pakistani migrant here: "When it came to expecting any understanding of our cultures in Japan, we might as well have been on the moon."

But the past two years have

backstreets of Shinjuku, a busy area in the heart of Tokyo, for example provides ample proof of how Asian cultures have penetrated Japan.

A visitor is immediately greeted by a bedlam of halal foodstores, restaurants offering various Asian cuisines and video stores displaying Thai, Indonesian, Indian and Chinese titles.

Most municipal offices in Tokyo have also begun services in English, Chinese and Filipino, with some even offering Spanish for the growing number of Latin American migrants.

That national Suchinda Izumi, who conducts seminars that deal with closer integration with Asians, says more and more Japanese have been signing up for her classes.

"That cooking lessons are extremely popular as well as language and dance," she says. "More Japanese women are taking time off to try and understand their Asian neighbours better."

The rise in mixed marriages has apparently also contributed to increased efforts among Japanese to understand other cultures.

Pakistani Alnaris Mithani, who is planning to build a mosque in Tokyo, says he conducts special Koran classes for Japanese wives of Muslim men.

Letters for publication

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

UN Security Council

Sir, The First World War produced the League of Nations which embodied the then American President Wilson's efforts to bring idealism to bear upon practical politics. But the idealism vanished into thin air before the selfish considerations of individualistic diplomacy.

During World War II, a vast majority of countries realised the necessity to live as one family, in a single "world state", where all nations may dwell together in peace and amity. It is this ideal which gave birth to the United Nations Organisation.

The UN has six main organs, of which the Security Council is the most vital having to deal with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Security Council then consisted of five permanent members and six non-permanent members.

But, after the passage of about half a century, and with the occurrence of an entire global convulsion in ideals and ideology, in political scenario, economic muscle, social order, a move by majority of states is under way for expansion of the out-dated and worn-out composition of the Security Council. Instead of 15-member Security Council, a vast section of the member states has emphasised that the number of members may be raised up to 25. Some have proposed that in place of 5-permanent members, the number be raised to 7 and that one permanent seat each be allotted to a certain geographical region. Several factors have to be taken into consideration for the inclusion as permanent members. The vital criteria for the Council membership are, major contributions to the peace-keeping muscle, financial contributions, population and territo-

rial size, economic potential, regional importance, efficient internal organisation, geopolitical situation, military capability and cultural contribution etc.

In our view, apart from increasing the size of the Security Council, the system of permanent members be done away with and they should be treated on equal footing. The veto system should be dispensed with and instead, the members should cast a vote each for or against an SC Resolution and proposal over critical issue posing a threat to international/regional/geopolitical peace and such tangle as cannot be solved by bilateral/trilateral dialogue. The United Nations Resolutions shall prevail and supersede any bilateral pact/agreement in case of its failure to reach a solution. The Security Council should also set in motion for solution of any irritant between two/three countries. The number of non-permanent members should also be increased to double the present size.

N H Sufi
Dhaka

'Baridhara J Block'

Sir, The letter of Mr Moinuddin Choudhury (The Daily Star, 22nd Jan) speaks the mind of all allottees and raises question about our system. The hon'ble minister had earlier made similar commitment in the parliament. We learned from press reports that there is a parliamentary sub-committee to deal with this 'problem'. Some reports also hinted that the personal interest of a VIP was creating obstruction in the path of the Parliament, the minister, the Rajuk and others to find a solution. These are all surmises, from tid-bits appearing here and there, and we are at a loss to understand the correct sit-

uation. The system provides no one to account for the agony of the frustrated allottees. As it seems, it is so easy to get away with any misdeed or whim!

An allottee
Dhaka

Eligibility for CMH

Sir, Combined Military Hospitals in different cantonments, are, reasonably, good hospitals. Apart from members of the armed forces, officers and staff of the Ministry of Defence, Military Engineering Services who are civilians and all Secretaries to the government are also entitled to treatment in CMH. But it is an irony of fate that people who are working inside the cantonment area directly with the members of the armed forces such as officers and staff of Military Estate Office, Directorate of Military Lands and Cants and Cant Boards are not entitled to treatment in CMH. Number of this category of people is very limited but they have to go outside for treatment.

May I, therefore, request the Chief of Army Staff and Honourable Defence Minister to look into the matter and kindly entitle these people to CMH treatment.

Tarveer Hussain
Dhaka Cantt, Dhaka

UN agencies' summit in Dhaka

Sir, It is heartening to learn that the heads of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP and IFAD are going to meet in Dhaka, February 6-8, to exchange views and to review their ongoing programmes and future policies and matters relating to human resources development, poverty alleviation, health and family planning and women in development etc.

This is the first summit of the UN Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) comprised of heads of UN agencies which is going to be held outside New York or Rome where they meet annually.

The selection of a new venue by the UN agencies for holding their summit in Dhaka for examination, collaboration and coordination of their worldwide activities is a tribute to the political stability and establishment of democratic government in the country as well as Bangladesh's growing importance both in regional and international affairs.

We wish the UN agencies' summit in historic Dhaka city all success.

O H Kabir
Dhaka-1203

Important projects

Sir, I would like to suggest a very viable and nationally important project. We earn a very substantial amount of foreign exchange from the export of garments. Unfortunately, much of the foreign currency earned by this industry goes out of the country for the purchase of yarn, textiles and accessories. We must plan to produce these materials within the country to stop the exodus of hard earned foreign currency.

A broad-based plan must be drawn up to keep our earnings within the country. I am sure, Bangladeshi entrepreneurs will easily see the prospects and come forward to take part in these nationally viable and important projects, such as textile mills, yarn, spinning and weaving mills, dye and chemical plants as well as accessory manufacturing. These plants should ideally be dispersed all over the country in order that the entire country benefits from the development. Small spinning and weaving factories may be planned as cottage industries. Foreign investment together with knowhow can participate in these ventures for mutual gain. Undoubtedly, for all the above projects the involved personnel would have to be trained. Each project should therefore integrate a training aspect so that local personnel would be ready to take over when the project is ready to take off.

Zahur Hossein
Dhaka

OPINION

Dhaka Traffic: Viable Alternatives

To those arriving from abroad the first impression about Dhaka city traffic, is one of sheer dismay. No one can conceive of keeping to a schedule in moving from place to place in Dhaka. In other major cities, traffic congestion is experienced, viz. Bangkok or Calcutta, but nothing on the scale of Dhaka. Most of the vehicular traffic moves willy nilly in complete disregard to regulations and convenience/safety of other road users. In this respect the worst offenders are the trucks and buses. Their sheer size and weight give them some immunity which they use disparagingly to crowd other traffic into untenable situations and inordinate delays.

The other reason for the chaotic situation is the presence of the huge number of rickshaws and motor rickshaws on the roads. They outnumber cars and other vehicles by 25/30 times. They slow down the traffic, cause enormous congestion and make movement very difficult.

The rickshaws and motor rickshaws no doubt provide employment and sustenance to a multitude of people. So, no hasty decision can be contemplated without creating a more invidious situation. But a decision to remove them seems inevitable, otherwise Dhaka traffic will come to a standstill in the not too distant future.

A strong, dedicated regulatory body and a well planned replacement programme are urgently needed.

Hence it is clear that Dhaka's public transport system is in dire need of extension and upgrading. Such a scheme may be drawn up and integrated with the phasing out of the rickshaws. Cooperatives of these vehicle owners can be formed under government aus-

pices and financed through government schemes. These co-operatives can own the new fleet of buses and mini coaches to replace the rickshaws.

The members of the co-ops could be involved in the new transport system from the very start. They could be integrated in the planning and when it is operative, could drive and conduct the bus services and maintain the vehicles. This type of personal involvement would ensure, among other things, efficient organisation. When operative, the system would improve the tenor of life of the participants, easing them out of back-breaking work and allow them more time to look after their families.

Another possibility is the installation of a smaller gauge railway or tram service to run along the periphery of Dhaka city and some major centres, such as Gandaria, Sadarghat, Nalgola, Satmasjid and Mirpur. From there it could cut across — running parallel to the existing new road — to the Cantonment, Banani, round to Shahjahanpur, Rampura and back to Gandaria. This system could carry the bulk of passengers and 'cargo' between the centres. Ideally, the railway and/or tramway system would be run by electrical energy this minimising the pressure of pollution and noise.

The circular transport system could be usefully complemented by a heavy duty inner ring road which would ply the heavy vehicles, such as trucks. These would bypass the main city limits and avoid clogging up the city traffic. They would move their 'cargo' to main centres and outstations such as Savar and Narayanganj.

Zahur Hossein
Gulshan, Dhaka