

DOWN TO EARTH

Miseries of City Life

By A S M Nurunnabi

In an interview recently granted to The Daily Star, the newly elected Mayor of the Dhaka City Corporation gave his ideas as to how he would deal with some of the outstanding problems facing the city. The points that figured during the discussion together with some other outstanding problems of the city are highlighted below.

Dhaka city is one of the fastest growing urban centres of the world in terms of population. According to a recent international survey, the city is on the threshold of becoming one of the megacities of the world by the turn of the century.

The prospect, though a cause of pleasure, confronts us at the same time with the stark realities of the inadequacies of our civic life. As the odds are tremendous, it will not be easy to make significant progress in that sphere so as to match the status of a megacity.

The city life leaves some basic things to be desired. In such amenities of a modern city as roads, drains and sewage, lamentable shortcomings exist, due to which a city dweller's life is subject to great suffering and tribulations.

In most of the areas outside the posh and semi-posh areas in the new part of the Dhaka city the conditions of life and living are most pitiable. Particularly in old Dhaka, there is a good number of enclaves of poverty and squalor. In fact, roads in rotten conditions are scattered all over the city. The same story of neglect and indifference affects the surface drains of the city. The extent of environmental pollution resulting from the lack of adequate drainage is compounded by the absence of adequate scavenging service of the city corporation. The state of the city's sewerage is equally at its worst.

The poor state of maintenance of the city bazaars is another sore point. Perhaps part of the blame for it rests on the vendors whose slovenly ways of doing business cause the accumulation of sludge and garbage all around. Such careless vendors need be disciplined by the municipal staff who should also ensure that clearance of garbage is done

regularly and promptly.

Another affliction that the citizens suffer is the mosquito menace. It continues unabated. Except for the small minority who live in mosquito-proof netted habitats, life after dusk for the majority is a tale of helpless agony from the menace. The city dwellers complain with bitterness that the concerned authorities are helpless to do anything effective to curb the menace. The new Mayor has assured us that for mosquito eradication he would employ volunteers to clear the stagnant water bodies where mosquito breeds. Party workers and also workers from other parties would be involved to work voluntarily as the city corporation does not have additional manpower. Let us hope that the strategy indicated by the Mayor would produce results.

Dhaka's traffic situation is at present horrid. One particular aspect which is a terrible strain on one's patience and a cause of loss of many valuable workhours is the perpetual traffic jams on important roads. The principal factor causing them is the slow-moving cycle rickshaws. Most of the time and particularly at peak hours, the vast panorama of these primitive vehicles inching their way through crowded roads in busy areas presents a mind-boggling spectacle. The existing road networks and booming populations have made commuting for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic a stupendous exercise.

The crucial question now is what should be done with the rising tide of rickshaws. As rightly observed by the new Mayor, they provide far too many jobs and support too many families. So rickshaws cannot be withdrawn without creating more viable alternatives. To relieve congestion on roads, one suggestion is that for a start we may put a ceiling on how many rickshaws our roads can hold. Given the area-wise distribution of road capacity, it may be possible to issue specific permits. According to another suggestion, most of the roads can be easily divided into two sections: One for rickshaws and the other for speedy vehicles.

PM: People-based politics

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and the achievements of her government.

Referring to the restoration of parliamentary democracy in the country to suit the demands of the time, the Prime Minister said her government has been making relentless efforts for establishing democratic principles in all tiers of the society.

Democracy is a growing system," she said and added it needs steady and firm endeavours to attain its final objectives.

The Prime Minister said the speedy implementation of economic structural reforms has put an undesired pressure on some sections of society.

Proper safety measures, she assured, would be taken for those peasants, workers and others who are facing this pressure for the sake of greater national interest.

The insecurity of those members of the society might jeopardise democracy and the market economy, Begum Zia said, adding her government is going to take various programmes to tackle any such situation.

The Prime Minister referred with great respect the heroic martyrs whose sacrifices earned the independence of our beloved motherland and said, "This independence has given us the self identity and the dignity of a proud nation."

She said the supreme sacrifices initiated by the heroic people 23 years ago remind us again and again that we are ever ready for any sacrifice to safeguard the independence of our beloved motherland.

Begum Khaleda Zia said she had deemed it necessary to inform the nation on the eve of Independence and National Day how far she could discharge the responsibility bestowed on her as the head of the democratic government three years back.

She said it was an unparalleled challenge taking over the responsibility of running the government at a time when the socio-economic infrastructure had collapsed during the one-man rule; endless anarchy had spread in the financial in-

stitution, national resources were being spoilt in the name of 'development activities', the election system had been turned into a farce through voterless polling, a few people made huge money overnight with one man's patronage and the state treasury was being used as a personal fund.

She said "The first responsibility for us was transition from one-man rule to a democratic system and restoration of people's confidence in the elections and the elected bodies. We could restore confidence of the people by holding proper polls of the Jatiya Sangsad, four city corporations and different local government bodies during the last three years in a free atmosphere."

The Prime Minister said "to meet the need of the time we reintroduced the parliamentary system of democracy by amending the constitution and we are working ceaselessly to establish democratic norms in every sphere of social life."

Democracy, she said, is an ever-expanding system and it needs slow but steady efforts to reach the ultimate goal.

Press freedom

"You are aware that the press is one of the main pillars of a democratic system. No socialist system can become democratic without freedom of the press. The press has been enjoying absolute freedom during our government's tenure," she pointed out.

Begum Zia said: "I believe that the role of independent press can benefit the country and people without disrupting national security and stability and without curbing the basic human rights."

Market economy

The Prime Minister described the market-based production system as the fruit of the advancement of human civilization, saying the aim of a market economy is to open up the creative initiatives of each and every citizen in an environment free from unnecessary state intervention.

As a result, she said, any individual could make his or her

Once the movement of rickshaws is regulated, about 50 per cent of the order on the roads would be achieved.

The hawkers pose another serious problem in city life. One common reason for hawkers to be evicted from their unauthorised places is the problem they create for pedestrian and vehicular traffic. In fact the traffic problem is compounded not by the hawkers alone. The rickshaws are also to blame. The new Mayor assured us that the corporation would think of alternative measures for their rehabilitation. As suggested by him, one way may be to look for certain areas for them to trade. Open markets at some particular places could be another option. The important thing is that a compromise solution should be found between the extremes of uncompromising policy of eviction and the untrammelled freedom of city hawkers to ply their trade.

One particularly distressing practice of the city corporation is the obnoxious movement of open garbage trucks at peak traffic hours in the morning through the city's road network. This is unthinkable in any modern city. It behoves the corporation authorities to stop this nauseating practice immediately and ensure that the work of collection and carrying of garbage from different points is completed in the small hours of the morning as is done in many modern cities.

The city with its multi-faceted problems does not compare favourably with other metropolitan cities of the region. The city's population continues to grow rapidly and with it the burgeoning insufficiency of its facilities and amenities. This poses a challenge which the city's infrastructure is called upon to meet. The financial constraints understandably are a constant critical factor for this backwardness. But there is no reason why with more determined efforts and greater commitment to make better use of available resources on the part of the concerned agencies, things cannot be made noticeably better than at present.

The Prime Minister's visit to Tokyo is also being seen here more as a trade promotional and 'image building' exercise to attract Japanese private investment to Bangladesh.

However, the official line is that it is a 'goodwill' visit aimed at strengthening existing bilateral relations. Officials also assert that the Prime Minister is not carrying a 'shopping list' of requests with her.

But the composition of the Prime Minister's 73-member entourage, including a 30-member team of business leaders, provides a clear indication about the importance placed in reinforcing the economic relationship with Japan, the country's single largest bilateral donor.

The itinerary of the delegation, too, suggests the visit is geared to enhancing Dhaka's trade and investment prospects among Japanese business.

Begum Zia pointed out that taking advantage of this system in the past some people became affluent through permits and licences.

"This is unfair and socially not acceptable," she said and argued that there was no alternative to a market economy for a poverty and resource-riden Bangladesh.

The Prime Minister, however, mentioned that it is true that the structural adjustment programmes undertaken by the present government for deriving the benefits of a market economy had created undesirable pressure on some classes of the society because of the hasty pace of its implementation.

Social justice

Begum Zia termed social justice as one of the constitutional commitments and said an appropriate social safety net had therefore to be created for those of the society including farmers-labourers' who had been facing undesirable pressure because of the economic structural adjustment programme undertaken for the sake of the country and the nation.

Referring to her key-note address at the FAO session held in Rome, she said that at that forum she had said: "It is still necessary to maintain public support in the important fields of day-to-day life of the poor people of most of the developing countries and there is no reason to stop those in the name of accelerating the market economy." Begum Zia said her government is going to initiate different programmes to take the situation.

The Prime Minister pointed out that her government, during the past three years, had amended some of the laws and regulations to remove the ambiguities and inconsistencies for making a market economy more effective.

She said that the ambiguities in economic transactions would reduce significantly as a result of those amended laws and regulations by leading newspapers.

Resource mobilisation

The Prime Minister highlighted her democratic gov-

ROK seeks ties with Japan to halt N-race

TOKYO, Mar 25: South Korean President Kim Young Sam called today for close South Korean-Japanese cooperation to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Asia-Pacific region, reports AFP.

"We must cooperate even more closely to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and bring under control arms races in the Asia-Pacific region," Kim said at a speech before Japan's Diet (national assembly).

Kim made the statement amid mounting suspicion over North Korea's nuclear programme following its refusal to allow full international inspections of its nuclear sites.

On Thursday, Kim and Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa agreed that North Korea must allow fresh nuclear inspections or face sanctions.

North Korea's suspected nuclear weapons programme has triggered concern that it would prompt South Korea and Japan to produce their own.

But Hosokawa made it clear at the summit Thursday that Japan would "never have any nuclear weapons," dismissing such concerns as "groundless."

Kim said that South Korea and Japan should also more closely pull together to induce openness and reform in North Korea and "to promote the cause of peaceful unification of South and North Korea."



Visiting South Korean President Kim Young-Sam (L) is escorted by Speaker of the Japanese House of Representatives Takako Doi (R) before his speech at the Diet yesterday. — AFP photo

News Analysis

Dhaka's bid to lure more yen

By S Y Bakht

and order, labour-management relations and continuity of the existing economic policies, the analysts noted.

Progress towards concluding a bilateral investment treaty between the two countries would also assure and encourage Japanese investors to come to Bangladesh.

The promotional activities of the Bangladesh team would include the holding two seminars on business and investment opportunities in the country and meeting Japanese business leaders, including an investors' forum.

The first wave of Japanese FDI, which started flowing in the '80s, mostly went to Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and China.

Bangladesh hardly received any Japanese private investment at that time and the renegotiation of the Karpnaphul Fertiliser Company (KAFCO) deal stopped what little Japanese investment may have come to this country.

Japanese investors have substantial equity in the 450-million dollar KAFCO Project and they took serious exception when the government renegotiated the deal in 1991. As a result, two planned Composite Textile Mills projects, worth 10 million dollars, in Bangladesh were immediately cancelled at that time.

Thus, the Bangladesh side would also have to tackle the lingering after-effects of the re-negotiation of the KAFCO deal.

The cumulative Japanese Official Development Assistance to Bangladesh between 1972 and '92 stood at over 5.5 billion dollars, which included 3.8 billion dollars in loan assistance and the rest as grants.

The annual disbursement of Japanese aid to Bangladesh stands at around 300 million dollars.

In a unique arrangement, the repaid amount of all outstanding debt to Japan is returned to Bangladesh as debt relief grant, and all loans up to 1987 is covered by this facility.

Khaleda's Japan trip

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Itinerary includes an audience with Emperor Akihito and meetings with the Japanese Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. The Japanese Emperor will host a court luncheon and Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa a banquet in honour of the Bangladesh Prime Minister and her delegation.

Thus, in addition to the salesmanship expected from the PM's delegation, the Japanese investors would like to be assured about the law and order situation and a perceived stability of political instability in Bangladesh.

The Prime Minister will leave Osaka in the afternoon of April 1 for home ending her five-day state visit to Japan.

Begum Zia will hold bilateral talks with her counterpart covering the entire gamut of bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest and concern.

She is expected to convey her thanks to the Japanese government for the economic assistance extended to Bangladesh since independence.

She will also hold discussions with leading business men and encourage them to invest in Bangladesh.

Already 15 Japanese companies have invested in the Chittagong Export Processing Zone, making a total investment of 35.8 million US dollars last year. They employ 1500 Bangladeshi personnel. Till last year 14 more Japanese investment proposals were received by the Board of Investment.

From 1971 to December last year Bangladesh received over 747 million yen (about 7,000 million dollars) as loans and grants besides technical assistance.

Asked about her question-

ing of Kashmirs accession to India, she said "Our focus is not on how the Kashmir problem stated, but on how it can be ended."

She expressed concern over 'credible' reports of human rights violations in Kashmir.

The Midnight File

Benazir goes to Oman today

MUSCAT, Mar 25: Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will begin a three-day visit to Oman tomorrow for talks with Sultan Qaboos on bilateral and regional issues, officials said here today. Omani economic experts said Pakistan was interested in purchasing Omani gas. Oman is planning to produce five million tonnes of liquefied gas annually from 1999. It signed a letter of understanding with India in 1993 to build a 1,440 kilometer-long (893 mile-long) pipeline to take Omani gas to the subcontinent, reports AFP.

Norway expels Iranian envoy

OSLO, Mar 25: Norway said today it was expelling an Iranian diplomat, but added the move was not linked to the shooting last year of the Norwegian publisher of Salman Rushdie's controversial book 'The Satanic Verses.' Consul Mohammad Movahed is not wanted in Norway for activities incompatible with his diplomatic status," the foreign Ministry said in a statement. It said he had 10 days to leave the country, reports Reuter.

Independence Day

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina in her message said the nation is celebrating the hard-earned independence day at such a time when the people were passing through severe economic crisis and political instability.

She said the main objective of the War of Independence under the leadership of Sheikh Mujib Rahman was to establish the rights of the people of the soil, enrich the nation in agriculture and industry and to uphold the culture of the Bangladeshi.

According to the official programme, President Bisswas will take salute and inspect a colourful parade to be held this morning at the National Square at the Old Airport. Members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, the Bangladesh Rifles, police, BNCC, Ansars and VDP will take part in the parade.

Begum Zia said her government had attached high priority to poverty alleviation and was working to ensure 'daal-bhat' for each and every citizen. The day will be heralded in the capital by a 31-gun salute at daybreak. The national flag will be hoisted atop public and private buildings while important buildings will be illuminated in the evening.

Bands of the Army, Navy, Air Force, BDR, police and Ansars and VDP will play in certain areas of the city.

The BNP will observe the day by hoisting the national and party flags at its party office at 5:30 in the morning.

Leaders and workers will place wreaths at the National Mausoleum in Savar to pay homage to the martyrs. They will also visit the mazar of late President Ziaur Rahman.

The Awami League will begin the day by hoisting the national and party flags at its office and at the Bangabandhu Bhaban at 6:00 am. The party has requested its leaders and workers to assemble at the Bangabandhu Bhaban in Dharmodi at 6:30 am to garland the portrait of Sheikh Mujib Rahman.

Later the party leaders and workers will visit the National Mausoleum. A discussion meeting presided over by Sheikh Hasina will be held at the party office at 3:00 pm.

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Magura results

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lodged complaints. If the votes in these 12 centres plus those of the three centres where polling was postponed do not cross the present margin of 33,625 between the BNP and AL candidates then it will be easier for the EC to give the verdict sooner, the source added.

Reforms in the administrative system