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DOWN TO EARTH

Continued Imbroglia In City Traffic

By A S M Nurunnabi

Much water has flowed down the Buriganga. Yet we seem to be doing nothing significant on the city road situation. Dhaka city traffic remains the same sea of chaos into which it has lately developed, despite persistent complaints made by the public and voiced in the national press and the electronic media.

According to observers, the characteristic features of the existing traffic chaos are not merely the fatalities caused by road accidents, but a plenitude of problems caused by the rapidly disappearing discipline on the roads, uncontrolled movement of all types of vehicles, the frequent inaction of the traffic police and almost a total lack of enforcement of any rule whatever to deal with road offences and offenders, or any step whatever taken to improve the standard of mobility on the roads.

It is really deplorable that the authorities concerned are dilly-dallying in the face of the steadily mounting traffic anarchy. Dhaka is already one of the most populated cities of the world. Knowledgeable people tell us that a situation like Dhaka's which had prevailed in big cities like Bangkok, Tripoli, Manila, Jakarta, Bangkok has been reversed by taking appropriate steps. Why is it that instead of concerted efforts taken to improve the situation on the analogy of those cities, we seem to be floating helplessly on the rising tide of traffic chaos and confusion.

According to observers, a disappointing part of the problem is that traffic in Dhaka is self-managed, and those officially deployed to manage and regulate it are functionally absent, practically, from the scene despite their physical presence all over. This is a paradox that needs to be resolved if the traffic problem in the city and all that is associated with it are not left to

chance. The most galling aspect of the growing traffic mess is created by traffic jams. The chaotic sights of traffic at a standstill for long periods at a stretch are becoming fairly common in many places these days. Clogging of traffic at some particular intersections in the city centre such as Gulistan, Motijheel, Purana Paltan, etc turn out to be most distressing for people when they are rushing to reach destinations on time for their duties or occupations at work places.

There are not many modern cities in the world where slow moving and fast moving transports add to the medley of traffic abnormality as in Dhaka. Motor cars, pedal rickshaws and push carts all vie for movement in Dhaka within narrow spaces with their varying speeds, which end up in snarls.

True, some spacious circular roads girding the city, constructed some years ago, have been helping traffic movement. But this advantage is being offset by the rapidly growing population of Dhaka. Along with such growth of population, the number of transports also increased significantly. It seems at that matching this rapid growth of population and transports, new thoroughfares and arterial roads have not been constructed proportionately to carry additional loads. As a result, we are getting worse and worse traffic jams.

According to experts, the cure lies in considerably building more roads and link roads taking into account the more dense parts and the greater directions of daily movements of people from these parts. Other important strategies adopted by other important urban areas of Asia to relieve road congestion include setting up of mass transit systems. Many megacities like Calcutta, Tokyo and Hong Kong, because of space limitation, have pushed upward from street level or downward below ground to set up light railway systems.

In the opinion of knowledgeable circles, a dramatic easing of the inordinate traffic burden in the older part of Dhaka can be achieved with one stroke if the big area of land now occupied by the Dhaka Central Jail in the heart of the old city can be recovered by expeditious implementation of the project for shifting the Central Jail. At least two major by-pass roads built over these lands may substantially ease the traffic burden in that part of the city.

The first step towards improved traffic management in Dhaka at present should aim at the rickshaws whose overwhelming presence complicates road discipline. To deal with hawkers and other squatters who are also responsible in a big way for recurring traffic jams, a proper, mutually acceptable policy of rehabilitating them within delineated zones should be pursued on an urgent basis. In the Gulistan and Baitul Mukarram areas, the problem of encroachment by hawkers has lately intensified so much that pedestrians face a hard time negotiating their passage through them.

The law enforcement agencies in charge of traffic regulation need to work more energetically to make their presence felt in traffic management.

A silver lining to the present dark picture of traffic chaos can be seen in a recent announcement that under the auspices of the World Bank, a study for an integrated transport plan for the city will be shortly undertaken. Let us hope that the projected study will open up ways and means of dealing effectively with the manifold city traffic problems.



Agitating launch workers brought out a procession in the city yesterday demanding their salaries as per the National Wages Commission award. — Star photo

Majid ul-Huq clarifies

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ment Board at first short-listed seven advisory firms for the supervision of construction and detailed design of the Dhaka Integrated Flood Protection Project. Afterward, Messrs Techno Consultant was included in the short list as the 8th firm in violation of the ADB guideline. A special standing evaluation committee was constituted with the Chief Engineer of the central region as its convener. This committee selected Messrs Techno Consultant as the first firm. As this selection did not appear to be proper and neutral, the Water Development Board directed the special standing evaluation committee to review its decision and submit a report, he added.

He said, the special committee again examined the matter and sent its recommendations to the Board, but the Board did not accept the recommendation. Rather it suggested the ministry give the work to the second successful firm M/s EPC.

The ministry examined the report and the relevant papers and considered the proposal and techniques of M/s EPC to be better than those of Techno Consultant and sent a proposal to the Asian Development Bank — the donor agency — recommending EPC for the work.

"But the Asian Development Bank, as per the decision of the special evaluation committee, decided to give the work to M/s Techno Consultant.

"At this stage, only on a point of principle, I again gave a detailed explanation as to why this eighth firm (Techno Consultant) should not be given the work and my stand in this regard was fully consistent with the ADB guideline. At the same time I called for explanations from the officials of the ministry as to why the ministry had not elaborately explained the matter to the ADB. Unfortunately, the ADB stuck to its previous decision.

"But after the ADB hinted it might stop its loans for other sectors too, I sent the issue to the Cabinet committee for public purchase for a decision.

"It is, therefore, very much clear that the question of my direct or indirect involvement in corruption does not arise."

Majid-ul-Huq said senior experts of the Water Resources Department of the BUET had prepared the design for the silt trap of the Teesta Barrage Project in 1992 and sent it to the design division of the Water Development Board (WDB) for testing.

The design division of the WDB had approved it on condition that the model of the silt trap should be submitted before its construction was started.

The Chief Engineer, Project-4 Rangpur, prepared the estimate for speedy implementation of the project and invited tenders and selected contractors for it.

But, he said, the then State Minister for Irrigation Anwar Ali Siddiquee formed a committee with the then chairman of the WDB as its convener to re-examine the design of the silt trap.

"The committee did not consider the acceptance of the tender by the chief engineer, Project-4 without studying the model as per the condition as correct. It recommended appointing the contractor after

Launch strike

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ches increase manifold before the Eid.

As their strike stopped some 3000 cargo and passenger vessels, the river transportation in the country has been virtually crippled.

While some 10,000 to 15,000 people used to come to Dhaka and about the same number leave Dhaka by about 100 launches of different sizes everyday. Only a small number is now ferried by the BIWTC launches.

Many were seen to undertake long journey by boats from Sadarghat yesterday.

Painting theft: One more held

By Staff Correspondent

Police arrested another person from Mymensingh town Thursday night in connection with the painting theft at the Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Museum.

Two others were arrested late Wednesday.

Muhammad Ali, an antique dealer of the town, was arrested from his Agra Madrassah Quarter residence by a special team of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) sent from Dhaka, police officials said.

They said that the police was also looking for an artist from Netrokona, suspected of leading a gang of robbers who broke into the Museum on May 2, 1992 and took away 17 art works of Zainul Abedin.

CID officials, however, declined to disclose the identity of the artist in the interest of investigation.

CID police on Wednesday seized 10 stolen paintings of the Shilpacharya from the possession of one of his long-time disciple after nearly two years of investigation.

ZIA

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Mannan but five of those were later found to be of employees on duty at that time.

The airport sources said that of the 11 arrested, four each were employees of Customs and Biman and one each of Sonali Bank, Civil Aviation and Gulf Air.

The state minister went round different sections of the airport and directed the officials concerned to ensure adequate facilities for the passengers.

Hasina

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sage from the Japanese capital.

She explained to them her party's economic and investment policies and said the Awami League welcomes foreign investment which will be fully protected.

Director general of the Japanese Foreign Ministry Tani Zaki led the talks with Sheikh Hasina. He also hosted a lunch in honour of the Awami League delegation visiting Japan.

The Awami League chief expressed thanks and gratitude for Japanese assistance for construction of the Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge. She also praised Japan for the generous assistance and economic support being extended to Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina along with her entourage left Tokyo for Singapore yesterday evening on conclusion of her five-day visit to Japan.

Kamal for nat'l dialogue to end JS impasse

By Staff Correspondent

Gana Forum leader Dr Kamal Hossain has called for a national dialogue to end the present impasse in parliament.

Speaking at the extended meeting of the central council of the forum at a city hotel, Dr Kamal criticised both the ruling party and the Opposition for 'failing' to resolve the issue. The two-day forum began yesterday.

The forum leader said the fall of Ershad and a fair election had created hopes in the mind of the people but the present impasse totally disappointed them.

He said that the city corporation elections were lauded by all but the Magura by-elections ruined the credibility of the government.

The ruling party's role during the by-election prompted the opposition parties to demand a care taker government for holding free and fair general elections. Dr Kamal said,

Inter-bank forex market

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of remittances from Bangladeshi expatriates are now pouring into the country through this bank.

On the other hand, a completely different breed of banks, known as the real market players, are coming into the market with full force. These banks, having a relatively smaller customer source, buy currencies from other banks and sell them to others at marginal profit. The profits can sometimes be as small as fractions of a paisa, sources said. But the main aim for the market players is to make as many deals as possible to have the accumulated profits stand higher at the end of the day.

Among these market players, the Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) is leading while the other players are American Express and Banque Indosuez, according to official statistics.

Specially the foreign banks are reaping the best benefits of the inter-bank market because of their easy dealing arrangements within groups, technical know-how and widespread global network, sources said.

When contacted, Mamunur-Rashid, treasurer of SCB, said "The government as well as the Bangladesh Bank are striving hard to generate competitiveness in the market. The SCB and other foreign banks with their various treasury products and regional support are trying to make the best out of this through active market participation."

Another change for the banks as a result of the inter-bank market is their tight vigil on the forex position.

Most commercial banks are of the opinion that they cannot operate within the given limit of the Bangladesh Bank since forex turnover has increased

Mansurul, Fasiul elected FBUTA President, SG

By Staff Correspondent

The Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA) yesterday elected a new 23-member committee for the year 1994-95.

Prof Mansurul Amin of the Agricultural University (BAU) and Prof. Fasiul Alam of the Chittagong University were elected President and Secretary General respectively.

Visa fee

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the exact amount — the consular section of the US Embassy will not make change. Small bills and coins will not be accepted. The fee will be collected prior to visa interview.

The US Congress has mandated this processing fee in legislation recently signed into law. The funds will be paid for the costs of processing applications for the fraud-resistant machine readable visas now being issued by the US Embassy in Dhaka and at other US embassies and consulates.

The fee will also fund upgraded computer systems for use by consular and immigration officials. The Tk 820 fee charge represents the approximate cost of processing each machine readable visa application.

Machine readable visas save time for travellers arriving at US immigration points. Immigration officials can scan information directly off the visa rather than manually entering data. Increased automation will also save time in the visa issuance process.

The fee is initially being instituted at a number of US embassies and consulates that already issue machine readable visas.

The State Department has set the fee in all locations as the local currency equivalent of 20 US dollars. The fee will eventually be implemented at all US visa issuing offices.

The Midnight File

48 die as Kurds, Turkish troops clash

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey, May 13: Fighting between Kurdish rebels and Turkish troops in the past two days left 48 people dead in southeastern Turkey, officials said Friday. Thirty-seven Kurdish guerrillas and soldiers died in clashes that began Thursday in the provinces of Diyarbakir, Sirnak, Van, Hakkari and Sirt. The regional governor's office said, reports AP.

Japan to join jt naval exercise

exercising in Pacific

TOKYO, May 13: Japan will join the United States, South Korea, Australia and Canada in an annual joint naval exercise in the Pacific this month, the defence agency said today. About 50 ships and 200 aircraft from the five countries will be taking part in the exercise, called Rimpac, staged around Hawaii between late May and early July, it said. Japan's maritime self-defence force has already sent a submarine and will alter dispatch nine ships and eight P3C anti-submarine aircraft, reports Reuters.

Opposition trying to fish

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tatives' convention of the Bangladesh Government Primary School Teachers' Association at Ramna in the city.

Talukdar, who is also the Secretary General of the ruling BNP, described the Opposition demand as 'no confidence' in the people's verdict. He said the people had voted the BNP to power in the last parliamentary polls held under a caretaker government. "If the Opposition demands a neutral government, where does the people's will stand?" he posed.

The minister said the Opposition wanted to create chaos and confusion by making such an unrealistic demand. He said the Opposition demand was nothing but an attempt to frustrate the democratic process in the country.

Chaired by Mohammad Suzzaman, president of the association, the function was also addressed by State Minister for Education Principal Eunus Khan, State Minister for Science and Technology Prof M A Mannan, journalist Gias Kamal Chowdhury, president of the National Teachers' Association Federation Dr Enamul Haque Khan, Secretary General Prof Shariful Islam, A F M Mahfuzul Haque Bhuiyan, Senior vice-president of the primary teachers' association and Abdul Awal Talukdar, secretary general of the association.

Referring to the current Opposition boycott of the Jatiya Sangsad, the BNP Secretary General said that during the session in March the Opposition had staged a walkout protesting a remark made by a minister. But subsequently the walkout turned into a boycott.

Talukdar said, "Even if we agree to accept their demand then the Constitution has to be amended by a two-thirds majority by placing a bill in the House."

He said in that case what would be the fate of elections to the local bodies and the by-elections in the parliamentary seats? "Would those be held under a caretaker government, as well?" he asked.

Talukdar referred to the allegations made by the Opposition about a 'subtle rigging' during the last parliamentary polls. "What is the guarantee that there would be free and fair elections under a caretaker government?" he asked.

However, he hoped that trade between the two countries could now increase five or even six times if proper efforts were made by both sides.

Earlier, the president of Chittagong Chamber Abul Kalam read out his address of welcome.

The Myanmar team today visited the Chittagong Export Processing Zone, a Buddhist temple and the Bandarban hill district. The team is expected to leave for Dhaka tomorrow morning.

Jericho

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control the two areas. Also today, the transfer of the southern Gaza Strip area to Palestinian police was completed with a brief handover of building plans at a Khan Younis brigade headquarters.

About 200 Palestinian police, escorted to the site by Israeli border troops and soldiers, took command at about 4 am, a military official said.

In the Gaza border town of Rafah, Israeli troops and police withdrew Thursday, turning over the police station and military government headquarters to about 40 locally recruited police.

Rafah, a town of 100,000 people, is the biggest to be ceded to Palestinian control. About 500 residents turned out to see the PLO flag run up over the police building, and spray paint was used to scrawl "Autonomy Administration" on both buildings.

"It is a great moment... to see the Israeli soldiers lowering the Israeli flag and have it replaced with the Palestinian flag," said Adnan Jumaa, a 40-year-old labourer who brought his two children to watch.

Myanmar team

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Jute spinners

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unfair advantage over the existing yarn/twine mills which they have been denied debt restructuring facilities.

The World Bank has recommended that this distortion be corrected by imposition of surcharge on BJMA mills which start producing yarn after debt restructuring. The proposed surcharge will equal the difference between the financial costs of a debt restructuring BJMA mill and that of a yarn/twine mill.

Witnesses said about a hundred JP workers armed with lethal weapons attacked one bus and two micro-buses carrying their rivals to a party conference in the town. They blasted crackers, beat up their opponents and damaged the vehicles.

Four seriously wounded party workers were admitted to Kotiadi Thana Health Complex.

Former state minister Majibul Huq Chhunna and Golam Rabbani Bulbul were elected president and general secretary respectively of the district JP at its biennial conference.