

DOWN TO EARTH City's Faulty Buildings

By A S M Nurunnabi

In the process of rapid growth of the city, certain aspects, particularly in the building sector, have proceeded on not so sound lines. At present, we find in the city two kinds of buildings which pose a threat to their occupants as well as their neighbours. One is the many new houses built on weak and unstable foundations while the other is the large number of old and dilapidated buildings in the old part of the city.

The rapid growth of population in the city has spawned a building boom in order to meet the fast rising demand for new housing. In the hectic process for new construction, the ordinary rules for safe and stable construction are often neglected. Some persons spurred by the motive for gaining quick profit, build houses with house building loans or other sources of financing at unsuitable sites acquired at low price. Such sites are not properly made ready for construction by necessary filling and compaction. Even where piling is necessary for foundation of such buildings, it was dispensed with to save expenditure. There are even cases where no engineer or architect is engaged to supervise the construction work.

More ominous is the tendency of some quarters to go in for construction without approval plan of the Rajdhan Unnayan Kartipakha (RAJUK). In one case it is alleged that on a particular important road in old Dhaka, unauthorised five or six storey structures have reportedly come up whose owners defy RAJUK to do what they can to enforce their rules. Such defiance of the RAJUK anywhere in the city need to be checked with a firm hand. Even where approval of the RAJUK exists and the construction was undertaken with loans from loan giving agencies, inspection of the progress of construction from

those agencies was done rarely or perfunctorily. As a result manifold defects and weaknesses develop in the construction.

There is no dearth of instances of such defective and weak construction. A five-storey Shantinagar building which recently developed a dangerous tilt earned headlines in all newspapers. Some years ago, another unauthorised apartment building at Goran in the city collapsed into a ditch. It was reported to have been raised on the surface of a hurriedly filled up marsh. According to observers, RAJUK's failure to enforce the building code accounted for these new hazards in a crowded city.

The new phenomenon of high-rise buildings poses another serious danger. Over the years hundreds of high-rise buildings came up in Dhaka and very few of them were possibly built to absorb mild earthquake shocks. The vulnerability of metropolitan Dhaka to even moderate intensity of earth tremor has grown too seriously due to subsidence of land caused by free-style lifting of ground water.

The present spree of constructing high-rise buildings in the city is a cause for concern from another point of view. The city does not boast of many wide roads. Yet many high-rise buildings are coming up along narrow streets in many areas. Apart from creating traffic jams such situations create impediments in reaching help to those in need in case of fire or medical emergencies when fire engines or ambulances find it difficult to negotiate such narrow streets. The Eastern Plaza on the Sonargaon Road near Hatirpool is a case in point. It is a source of constant traffic jams with nauseating environmental atmosphere created by an an-

chy of rickshaws and various slowmoving transports trying to negotiate that crowded point.

The old and dilapidated buildings in the old part of the city is also a cause for concern. Most of them were built during the British period. Some of them are now so dilapidated that one may wonder how they can still stand. When there are heavy downpours for long or a violent gust of wind, there is every danger of their collapsing. In fact, such accidents took place in the past. The incident of the Jagannath Hall, DU, tragedy in 1985 in which around 40 persons were killed is still vivid in public minds. Yet the occupants of these decrepit houses do not seem to care about their safety. Mostly they are very poor people who have no place to go to. They, therefore, have no alternative but to live with the ever-present danger of house collapse.

The RAJUK have a duty to look into the matter. There is an urgent need to declare these houses as unfit for human habitation. If, despite such declaration, the occupants fail to vacate them or the owners of such houses 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 lives.

It behoves the Ministry of Works and the RAJUK to look into the problems of defective and dilapidated buildings in the new and old areas of the city to pave the way for orderly development. Observers feel that unless steps are taken immediately to enforce discipline in the construction sector, we will be facing accidents of endemic nature from these sorts of buildings in the same way as we are hard pressed to bring order in the city's existing anarchic traffic situation.



US President Bill Clinton shaking hands with World War II veteran Rocco Telesse at the grave of Lt Robert Waugh while visiting the cemetery at Nettuno, Italy yesterday during the ceremony commemorating 50 years of D-Day or the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. — AFP photo

Policemen injured

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Hospital (DMCH) and was later shifted to the Rajarbagh Police Lines Hospital. Doctors had to amputate all the remaining digits on his left hand. Sultan also suffered splinter wounds on his face, chest and back. Of the other policemen, a sub-inspector Abdur Rob was wounded in his left eye and right hand, sub-inspector Shamsul Haque on his right hand while constable Zulfiqar, who was driving the vehicle, received injuries on his head, face and chest from splinters. All were admitted to the Police Hospital.

The nabbed mugger Babul, 24, who was hit by a bullet on his right shoulder, was admitted to the DMCH under police custody. Witnesses said that when the muggers, chased by the DB men entered the Bhagabati Banerjee Road, they lobbed at least a dozen crackers, one of which exploded inside the police van. Three separate cases have been lodged with Sutrapur police in connection with the incident.

Rwandan rebels overrun Kabgayi

ANIROBI, Rwanda, June 3: Rwandan rebels have overrun the government-controlled area of Kabgayi where thousands of Tutsi refugees are crowded into camps, a Red Cross official said today, reports Reuters.

"The Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) stroled in yesterday," the official said. The official said he had heard of the capture from Red Cross colleagues working in Kabgayi, a former Roman Catholic seminary 50 km (30 miles) southwest of the capital Kigali.

Opposition

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and Tofael Ahmed of the AL, Moudud Ahmed, Anwar Hossain Manju and Munirul Haq Chowdhury of the JP, Maulana Abdus Sobhan and Sheikh Ansar Ali of Jamaat and Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury of the NDP also attended the meeting. All issues, including the question of joining the budget session and the proposed framework for a caretaker government were discussed. The opposition parties and groups in Parliament will formally meet tomorrow (Sunday) to finalise the future course of action.

NAM meet ends

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Security Council to take every possible means, including the sending of peace keeping forces to halt the bloodshed in Rwanda. Another resolution also called for the holding of an international conference to solve crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina, sponsored by the UN Security Council. The conference also decided to choose Colombia to host next NAM summit conference. Colombian Deputy Foreign Minister Wilma Zafar Turbay announced today that upcoming NAM summit will be held in its port city of Cartagena, northwest of the Latin American country.

MPs trade slaps

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Two other women deputies joined the fracas, trading kicks and wrestling. Ma Ai-Chen of the Nationalist Party fainted amid the fighting and was rushed to a nearby hospital. Su had earlier demanded an apology from two male nationalist deputies for peeking at her panties when she was staging a sit-down protest in front of the podium in the assembly chamber on Tuesday. Kuo later insinuated that Su had invited the attention of the men by wearing a short skirt. "As a woman, one should be cautious about what one wears and how one acts," Kuo told the assembly before she was slapped.

NCC Bank now at LAKSHMIPUR

Lakshmipur — the alluvial land in between Meghna, Dakatia and Rahmat Khali rivers, is famous for coconut and betel nuts. Our 19th branch goes into operation at this important commercial centre from today. The new branch is located at Chowdhury Super Market (1st floor), College Road, Lakshmipur. 2 more branches will be inaugurated soon at Mitford and Bahaghat, Dhaka.

Ratan murder Police yet to unearth mystery

By Staff Correspondent

Police yesterday failed to make any headway in unearthing the mystery of the murder of businessman Ratan Mia.

Sutrapur police said they had interrogated some people in this connection but no arrest was made till yesterday.

Ratan Mia, 40, was shot dead near his residence at Rankin Street Thursday afternoon when he was returning home from Badamtoli, Sadarghat. The killers shot him thrice in the throat at a close-range. He was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared him dead.

Ratan Mia was an owner of a fruit-wholesale market at Badamtoli and a leaseholder of a jetty near Sadarghat.

The autopsy of the body was done at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and later the body was handed over to his relatives.

All wholesale markets at Babubazar and Badamtoli will remain closed today (Saturday) in protest against the murder of Ratan Mia.

Newspaper offices in city attacked

By Staff Correspondent

A militant fundamentalist group yesterday attacked the offices of two vernacular national dailies in the capital's Motijheel Commercial Area, injuring at least 15 people, including on-duty press photographers and policemen.

The attackers, under the banner of 'Touhidi Jagrata Janata', were demanding the death sentence for controversial writer Taslima Nasreen and ban on some newspapers, including the Janakantha, the Banglar Bani, The Sangbad, Bhorer Kagoj and Ajker Kagoj, witnesses said.

Several thousand demonstrators came out on the streets, after the Juma prayers in the Baitul Mukarram Mosque and attacked the Janakantha and the Banglar Bani offices with brickbats, sticks and even crackers, damaging the gates and windowpanes of the two offices.

The attackers were locked in clashes with police for more than an hour and also damaged some commercial establishments near the two newspaper offices.

According to police: two to three thousand activists of the Touhidi Jagrata Janata, while parading the street from the Baitul Mukarram to the Shapla Square hurled cocktails and bricks at the Janakantha office, damaging its doors and windows. They also pelted the policemen who had intervened. Police fired rubber bullets and lobbed teargas shells to disperse the attackers. The Bangladesh Sangbadpatri Parishad (BSP), in a statement signed by its president Kazi Shahed Ahmed, condemned the attack on the Daily Janakantha office.

Shantibahini

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mittie and the Shantibahini team. According to sources, a delegation of Chakma refugees, led by Upendra Lal Chakma, chairman of the Refugee Welfare Association is likely to arrive at Ramgarh border town on June 5 for talks with the Khagrachhari administration officials on the stalled repatriation of Chakma refugees.

The Midnight File

14 African states to deploy troops in Rwanda

HARARE, June 3: A summit of 14 African states agreed today to deploy troops in Rwanda and provide other aid to halt civil strife that has killed 500,000 people, conference chairman Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe said. Mugabe, interrupting a session of two-day economic talks by African leaders in Zimbabwe, said the 14 had agreed a statement to be issued to night condemning "genocide" in Rwanda and calling for an immediate end to hostilities and observance of a truce, reports Reuters.

Leghari to sue Sharif

ISLAMABAD, June 3: Pakistan President Farooq Leghari said today he planned to sue opposition leader and ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif for accusing him of misdeeds in dealings with a bank at the centre of a political scandal, reports Reuters.

China may back sanctions

DPRK test-fires missile over Sea of Japan

TOKYO, June 3: North Korea, facing growing hostility over its secretive nuclear programme, has test-fired another anti-ship missile over the Sea of Japan, a Japanese government source said today, reports Reuters. The source said North Korea fired the missile, believed to be an upgraded version of the Chinese-designed Silkworm, over the Sea of Japan on Thursday.

It was the second known test-firing by the Stalinist state of an anti-ship missile this week. Tokyo and Washington had separately said North Korea fired the first one into the Sea of Japan on Tuesday. The Japanese source played down the significance of the tests.

NAM FMs urge DPRK to cooperate with IAEA

CAIRO, June 3: Non-Aligned foreign ministers urged North Korea today to cooperate with UN inspectors in a bid to defuse tension over Pyongyang's nuclear programme, reports Reuters. The call, in a final draft declaration before ministers as they wound up four-day meeting in Cairo, appeared to represent a setback for North Korea, which has refused to grant the United Nations experts access they want to its nuclear sites.

Ganges barrage

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grated Development Studies of Nepal — also published a report on the common regional problems relating to water sharing, environment, inland water transport, natural disaster management and energy. The unique "private approach" by the three organisations apparently started when the successive state-level efforts to make headway towards resolving the outstanding environmental problems bogged down.

4 killed in Feni truck mishap

FENI, June 3: Four people, including three army personnel were killed and 11 others injured when a truck skidded off the road and fell into a ditch on the Dhaka Chittagong highway near Feni at 5.30 am today, hospital and police sources said, reports UNB.

Sepoys — Habib, Mahbub Rashid and Akbar Ali died on the spot. While, an unidentified civilian succumbed to his injuries at Feni Sadar Hospital.

According to the sources, a Chittagong-bound truck from Dhaka carrying 15 passengers, met the accident at the Mohammad Ali Market in Chaddagram thana of Comilla, as it lost control, leaving three people dead on the spot and 12 others injured. The bodies were sent to Feni Sadar Hospital and later on shifted to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Chittagong for post-mortem.

Of the injured, six were released after first aid while five others, including the truck driver, were sent to the CMH, Chittagong.

Earlier, the member states even declined to recognise those problems and sit for regional level talks, he pointed out. The pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, and the detailed engineering drawings of the projects approved in the Kathmandu water conference would start immediately, Dr Ahmad said, adding the GIF was keen on funding the studies.

Funds for construction of the projects would be arranged later, he added.

Kuldip on Ganges treaty

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thing from Bangladesh side which creates mistrust between two neighbours," the Indian journalist said adding "can we restore the trust."

He said that any dam or barrage on common rivers should be constructed after consultation between the two governments in future.

Nayar said India is now suffering from water scarcity and the slogan "give freedom to Ganges" is being chanted in parts of the affected areas.

"We are not government representatives but we can create public pressure," he added.

Since 1989, there is no agreement between the two countries on water sharing. The first agreement was signed for five years in November, 1977, specifying share of water between January and May. After the expiry of the agreement in 1982, the two countries renewed it as a memorandum of understanding (MOU) twice on two-year and three-year terms.

Amjad Hossain, former Chairman of Bangladesh Water Development Board, said in his paper that the Ganges recorded the lowest flow of 9,437 cusec of water on April 6, 1993 against a flow of 60,000 to 65,000 cusec during pre-diversion period.

He said the unilateral withdrawal of water caused a disastrous effect on agriculture, fishery, navigation, hydro-morphology, salinity, industry, drinking water and forestry. The Ganges-Kobadak irrigation project which has a command area of 3.5 lakh acres of land in Kushtia region failed consecutively for the past two years, he added.

Hasna Moudud said the findings convinced all concerned that the degradation of ecosystem would have far reaching effects if it was not checked right now.

Deputy Speaker Humayun Khan Panni, Jatiya Party leader Moudud Ahmed MP, World Bank Resident Representative Willoughby, Vice Chancellor of the Open University Dr Shamsur Ali and environment experts and journalists were present at the workshop.

Following is the six-point recommendation adopted at the workshop:

1. Immediate action be taken to evolve modalities of participation of all interest groups in Bangladesh and India at different levels and areas to achieve the objective of a process of informed consultation on the issue of sharing the

Khaleda

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of the Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal's extended meeting at her Sugandha office. The two-day meeting began yesterday with its president Mirza Abbas, MP in the chair.

Begum Zia advised her party members to avoid accusation, allegation and criticism against each other and think of how to develop the country and improve the lot of the people.

She instructed the Juba Dal leaders to increase its members in the nook and corner of the country and form sub-committees and special cells for strengthening the organisation.

"Youths are the life blood of the society. You have to be attached to common man," the Prime Minister said and urged the Juba Dal leaders and workers to stand beside the people for removing their sufferings.

The meeting was also addressed by BNP secretary general Abdus Salam Talukder, Juba Dal general secretary Goyeshwar Roy, Barkatullah Bulu MP, Badruzzaman Kashru and Abu Syeed Khan Khokon.

Besides the central leaders, some 40 leaders from district and central committees, spoke at the meeting.

The meeting in a resolution decided to hold the central conference of the Juba Dal on October 27, this year.

In another resolution, it observed that the Parliament boycott by the Opposition is a serious threat to democracy and development activities and called upon the Opposition MPs to join in the forthcoming budget session.

FAP

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vironment. The ambassador's suggestions came following some questions raised at the European Parliament in Strasbourg as result of a campaign by certain quarters over the past couple of years about the rationale of funding the FAP when it had not been endorsed by the elected Parliament. The question was answered by saying that, the present government had undertaken the FAP as "a way of river management as part of its development programme."

The proposed FAP is a massive multi-billion dollar flood control programme initiated by the government following the severe floods of 1987 and 1988.

The ambitious programme aims at charting an integrated national water management policy to control floods in the country. It is financially and technically supported by the donors including the US, the UK, France, the Netherlands and Japan.

At the study level, the FAP is divided into 26 components.

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