

DOWN TO EARTH

City's Growing Housing Needs

By ASM Nurunnabi

The rate at which population is increasing in Dhaka city there is no doubt that in the next decade, housing will figure as one of its major problems in saying so, we are perhaps making an understatement, because the housing problem with the existing volume of population already boggles our mind.

At present quite a large segment of the city population is living in slums which are steadily expanding. The life of the people at the lower strata of society is bedeviled by the rising pressure of house rent burden. Currently this area has totally gone out of control. The affected people feel with bitterness that whomever rather than any rationale, guide the fixing of house rents. Such arbitrarily raised rates of house rent have their adverse impacts on society and contribute to the escalation of living costs. This crisis is sure to deepen in the next 15 to 20 years.

According to a recent survey, ordinary city dwellers and those of limited means spend 74 per cent of their income for renting some sort of shelter for themselves. According to the World Bank, 12 lakh units will be necessary for housing the homeless but for most of the city dwellers of limited means, finding any kind of residential arrangement will remain a chimera.

Not only in Dhaka but also in many important cities of the developing countries, economically distressed people in rural areas make a beeline for urban areas in search of opportunities to improve their lot. Inevitably the brunt of this inexorable shift of population will be borne by the Dhaka city, spawning many serious problems like housing, communication, water supply and other infrastructural requirements.

The government has been addressing the problem for urban dwellers by construction of accommodation for those on its pay rolls, developing satellite townships and providing house building loans directly to the employees and through financial institutions to others. Recently government reportedly approved a scheme for construction of 2500 flats through PWD for the govern-

ment employees. The development work for 11,000 residential plots at Mirpur is said to be proceeding apace. The capital development authority (RAJUK) has a programme to develop 6000 acres of land in Yusufganj to meet the growing housing demand in the city.

With the rise in the cost of living over the years and the current cost of constructing a building so high that it is far beyond any one's dream, the possibility of the government being able to solve this problem is unlikely, but despite this, some viable solution has to be found if the whole city is not to become a large unmanageable shanty.

In this context, it is heartening to note that a grand housing plan in the private sector is in the offing. This plan is supposed to have the potential to benefit a substantial portion of the hard-pressed middle and lower middle class people and serviceholders of the city.

It is understood that the government has found merits in the plan and is intent on extending necessary cooperation for its successful implementation. As regards pooling of resources for the plan, it is understood that this will be met by using the idle bank money. Another option is said to be to seek the major portion of the fund from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Help from foreign donor agencies and local banks is also expected.

Under this plan, initially 11,000 flats will be built in the city. These flats will be sold for an initial ceiling price and the rest will be payable in installments over a period of 25 years. The instalments are expected to involve no bigger an amount than the rent of an average family of the targeted class who has to pay each month. If everything proceeds according to the plan, there are reasons to be optimistic about the solution of the present housing crisis in the city.

It is felt that the policy generally followed by government in allotting plots in government estates needs to be revised because it does not take into account the possibilities of optimum utilisation of

Sylhet transport strike continues

From Our Correspondent

SYLHET, Aug 5: The second day of the indefinite strike called by the transport owners and workers in Sylhet district passed off today while the strike on different routes in Sunamganj district passed its ninth day.

Meanwhile, television viewers here could not watch BTV programmes for about two and a half hours today due to technical faults in the micro-wave channel.

An official source, when contacted, confirmed the interruption from 3 pm to 5:22 pm.

Earlier, international telephone calls through the Sylhet international telephone exchange were totally stopped for about 17 hours yesterday due to faults in the radio-link of the repeater station at Shahibazar.

The exchange remained out of order from 3:15 am to 7:25 pm yesterday.

He also said that some 300 professional blood donors create problem in the slum area.

He confirmed that they would expedite the eviction process and clear the slum area by the end of the month.

He refuted the allegations that the employees had unhealthy relations with the students.

Now there is no problem from our side. As soon as the authorities rehabilitate us in a new area, our employees will leave the college area," he said.

NATO jets

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importance of the issue, a panel of three judges will consider the case in November.

Feminists often argue that the Muslim code is abused by men who divorce their wives for the flimsiest of reasons, but in Ms. Nisa's case it is the woman who is seeking that the law be upheld.

She accepted her 1969 divorce from her husband Mohammad Rahamatullah in exchange for agricultural land. The divorce was challenged by the Uttar Pradesh state government when it enacted a law declaring land to be joint property of husband and wife for tax purposes.

Three months ago Uttar Pradesh High Court ruled that the divorce was illegal.

Abdul Mannan, Ms. Nisa's lawyer, said that judgement had caused confusion among Indian Muslims, and other cases pending in courts were being held up.

Turning to the guardians, Begum Zia said it is imperative that children are brought up "imbued with morality, patriotism and the inspiration to take greater interest in our traditional culture."

Information Minister Nazmul Huda, State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs and Sarwar Rahim, Information Secretary Dr Ekram Hossain and BTV Director General Habibur Rahman also addressed the function attended by ministers, MPs and guardians.

The bombings come a day after Serbia cut off crucial support to its Bosnian Serb brethren for rejecting the latest plan to end 28 months of war.

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A group of political leaders and workers from Nagarpur thana of Tangail district presenting Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina a bouquet at her Minto Road residence yesterday

— Star photo

JCD, BCL stage protest today

By DU Correspondent

The pro-Awami League Chhatra League (M-II) has called a strike at the Dhaka University and the BNP-backed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) will observe a demonstration day at all the educational institutions in the country today to protest the terrorist activities on the DU campus Thursday.

Both the BCL and the JCD have blamed each other for Thursday violence.

UNB adds: Some unruly youths yesterday beat up two activists of the JCD on the Dhaka University campus.

Zaman, a student of the Law department was beaten up by a group of youths, allegedly belonging to the Pro-Awami League Chhatra League at the TSC area while, Rupak, a student of the Journalism department was beaten up at the Jagannath Hall. Zaman was admitted to the PG hospital in a critical condition.

In this manner, by building several lakh of flats of various sizes and allotting them to deserving people, the Singapore government is reported to have achieved tremendous success and popularity. Accordingly, observers suggest that by emulating the Singapore example, it may be possible to tackle the acute housing problems of the city as well as of other densely populated urban areas.

Financing such projects is, of course, a big headache. The only hope for us in this sphere lies in our attempts to seek assistance from international financial institutions like the Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank with all possible supplementary support from our own resources.

DU provost body concerned

The Provost Committee of the Dhaka University yesterday expressed its anxiety at the violent situation on the campus during last few days and condemned such incidents, reported BSS.

The committee at its meeting held yesterday with vice-chancellor in the chair reviewed the situation arising out of violence during last few days on the campus and in the halls.

The hall provosts informed the committee that news items about ransacking of some rooms of a student organisation in different halls published in a section of the press were untrue. However, some problems arose in two rooms of the Haji Mohammad Mohsin Hall which the provost has assured of solving at the earliest.

Gas project

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cubic feet of gas per day after the factory is commissioned in December next.

The project is composed of three components: Construction of the 58 kilometre Ashuganj-Bakhrabad trunk line; setting up of a telecommunication system for the Kallashila-Chittagong trunk line; and drilling three production wells in Rashedpur, along with setting up a gas-processing plant there.

The tender for the Ashuganj-Bakhrabad trunk line was opened by Petrobangla earlier last month.

The government agreed to initiate a series of steps to strengthen the institutional and financial position of the gas companies.

These steps will enable the gas companies to become financially healthy and will prepare them for privatisation in the future," the WB source pointed out.

The understanding reached with the WB calls for allowing the three existing gas transmission and distribution companies — Titas, Jalalabad and Sylhet — to get more involved in the implementation and management of projects in the gas sector, which is currently being done by the project implementation unit of Petrobangla.

On allowing greater retention of the revenue, the government has agreed to reduce the percentage of gas revenue deposited with the national exchequer to 55 per cent from the existing 62 per cent, which was earlier lowered from 75 per cent in 1991.

The objective is that the companies should be able to generate internal resources for undertaking development projects, by relying less on government funding," the source added.

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Maj. Rob Annink, a spokesman for UN peacekeepers, said an undetermined number of Serb soldiers took the T-55 tank.

He confirmed that they would expedite the eviction process and clear the slum area by the end of the month.

He refuted the allegations that the employees had unhealthy relations with the students.

Now there is no problem from our side. As soon as the authorities rehabilitate us in a new area, our employees will leave the college area," he said.

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