

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 whims 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 bee line 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 requisites.

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 Yusufgang 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 slum.

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 115,000 flats will be built in the city. These flats will be sold for an initial ceiling price and the rest will be payable in instalments over a period of 25 years. The instalments are expected to involve no bigger an amount than the rent an average family of the targeted class has to pay each month. If everything proceeds according to the plans, 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

plots allotted to individuals or families. This aspect has emerged as important in view of the limited number of sites for construction in the Dhaka city for housing purposes.

From this perspective it is also felt that due consideration is not being given to building multi-storied buildings on individual plots of government land with provision of flats therein and allotting or selling the same on easy terms which can meet the housing needs of large numbers of deserving people. In this context, it is suggested that in any proposed housing estate of government, instead of allotting separate plots to individuals, multi-storied flats may be constructed under government management on such plots and such built-up flats may be allotted to deserving persons.

In this way, on the one hand, many allottees of plots lacking adequate resources to build a house will not be forced to keep such plots vacant; on the other hand, people will greatly benefit when they get ready-made government constructed flats on easy terms without going through the botheration of construction on their own. Following this practice, if a multi-storied building comprising twelve flats is built on a government plot under government management, twelve families can be provided with shelter instead of one family if that family alone is allotted that plot of land.

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.



A group of political leaders and workers from Nagarpur thana of Tangail district presenting a bouquet to Sheikh Hasina at her Minto Road residence yesterday marking their formal joining of the party. — 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's 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.

Meantime, students of the MA final-year of the department have cancelled their scheduled functions arranged on the occasion of their five-year in the university. It was scheduled on August 8.

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, reports 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 Kailash-Chittagong trunk line; and drilling three production wells in Rashidpur, 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.

Freak accident prevents father-daughter union

By DU Correspondent

But for a single bullet, Dr. Ratan Lal Chakrabarty would have been on his way abroad yesterday to meet his teenage daughter.

The Associate Professor of the History Department of Dhaka University sustained a bullet injury during the gunfight at the Arts Faculty Thursday.

He was scheduled to leave Dhaka to see his daughter Lopa who is studying at Shantiniketan in West Bengal, India.

He was struck in the leg by a stray bullet near the Arts Faculty building as he was heading home at around 12:10 pm. After lying on the sidewalk for several minutes he was sent to the Pongu Hospital in an ambulance.

"I was caught in a crossfire. It was an accident," said Dr. Chakrabarty lying on his hospital bed yesterday, feeling too weak to talk.

Dr. Chakrabarty had to suffer pain for several hours at the Pongu Hospital before being taken to the operation theatre at around 5 pm for surgery.

He is better now. The doctors found no serious damage. His wife Kalyani, at his

beside, told this correspondent that the bullet had just missed his shinbone.

The couple sent their only daughter Lopa to Shantiniketan in 1992.

"We sent her there just because of the campus trouble, specially after the violent incidents in 1991. Lopa's school was located in the centre of the campus," Kalyani said.

"The students should not be involved in the national politics," Dr. Chakrabarty said.

"They may involve themselves in politics but only politics centering around their own affairs," he said.

Dr. Chakrabarty would remain under observation at the hospital for at least another five days, hospital officials said.

He was awarded a gold medal in 1992 for his outstanding performance in research by the Dhaka University. He completed his BA degree from Patuakhali Government College and MA and PhD from the Dhaka University.

Only last month Chakrabarty returned home after a year as a senior fellow at Japan's Kyoto University.

'WB-IMF prescriptions serve capitalist cause'

Universal prescriptions and conditionalities of the World Bank and IMF, identified as tools of the capitalist world, came under severe criticism at a seminar in the city yesterday, participated mostly by left-leaning politicians and academicians, reports UNB.

Their universal, eternal prescriptions or 'fatwa' are directed in such a way that those can solve the inner crisis of capitalism, said Prof Anu Muhammad, speaking on the role of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The teacher from the Jahangirnagar University said: "When there was a golden age of capitalism, this sort of ideas could get some credibility but their limitations and inability to influence the course of development of capitalism are more exposed now."

The seminar, on the 'Fifty Years of the World Bank-IMF: In Retrospect', was organised by the Bangladesh Centre for Policy Research and Response, a Dhaka-based group of young research activists. Its coordinator, Rashed AM Titumir, delivered the address of welcome.

Renowned economists Prof Rehman Sobhan, Prof Muzaffar Ahmed and Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad chaired three sessions of the day-long analytical seminar at the Academy for Planning and Development at Nilkhet in the city.

Politicians Nirmal Sen, AFM Mahbubur Rahman, Haider Akbar Khan Ronu and Hasnat Quyum, academicians Swapan Adnan, Nasrin Khondoker and Mezbah Kamal, Saeed Rana of the World Bank and Shahed Khenisse of the IMF took part in the discussion.

Prof Rehman Sobhan termed the World Bank and the IMF as the 'cadres of particular philosophy' and said the multilateral lending organisations should not play the role of spreading the policies of US Congress.

He pointed out that more than 70 countries, most in the developing world, are now carrying on Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), as prescribed by the Bank.

"But the situation in their respective economies has not changed at the expected level. In most of the countries, investment scenario is negative, budgetary gap also not improved significantly."

Criticising the donors, he said: "We are theoretically sovereign but in practice, we have to swallow advice against our national interest."

Responding to the criticism, acting chief of the World Bank's Dhaka mission Saeed Rana said the Bank is changing and it will be changed further to be more responsive to the changing world.

There are one billion people living under the poverty line, he said. "And we would like to work with the governments for the benefits of those people."

In his paper, Debapriya Bhattacharya, a research fellow of the BIDS, said the Bretton Wood Institutes (BWIs), as the Bank and the Fund are known, were playing the role in Bangladesh as lenders, policy advisers, sources of intelligence and functional catalysts.

Giving an outline of their lending in Bangladesh, he said the loans were being disbursed at a relatively slower pace than the average of all sources.

Of a period of 21 years, he said, in seven years the Fund had a negative balance with Bangladesh and sucked in resources from the country's limited foreign exchange earnings.

The BIDS fellow observed that the BWIs have emerged as the mentor of the country's policy framework through their policy package.

Tenders for gas trunk line opened

Star Report

Petrobangla has opened the tender bids for the Ashuganj-Bakhrabad trunk line under the Gas Infrastructure Development Project (GIDP) on July 31.

Out of six vying companies, the lowest offer was 37 million US dollars by an Australian firm while the highest bid was 51 million dollars.

The 58-km pipeline is seen as crucial in improving the overall supply situation and for ensuring gas supply to Kafco, the country's largest foreign investment project.

Initially nine foreign firms had purchased tender documents for the trunk line construction, but only six participated in the biddings.

Petrobangla will now evaluate the technical and financial offers of the bidders and take steps for awarding the work order which is part of the 141 million dollars World Bank-funded GIDP programme.

The Midnight File

Rabin goes to Jordan Monday

AMMAN, Aug 5: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is to travel to Jordan on Monday on his first official visit to meet King Hussein. Information Minister Jawad Anani announced today. He said Rabin would cross to the Red Sea resort of Aqaba after a ceremony to make the opening of a new border crossing between the two countries to be attended by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, reports AFP.

US, DPRK resume talks

GENEVA, Aug 5: US and North Korean negotiators resumed talks on the communist country's nuclear programme Friday amid hopes the death of North Korean leader Kim Il Sung won't interrupt moves toward resolving the nuclear dispute. The talks, which began July 8 but were suspended a day later because of Kim's death, are intended to persuade North Korea to open its nuclear programme to international inspections, reports AP.

4 killed, 81 injured in road accidents

By Staff Correspondent

At least four persons were killed and another 81 injured in separate road accidents in the capital, Comilla and Lalmonirhat, according to reports received last night.

Our DMCH Correspondent said, an unidentified man died on the spot when two minibuses collided near Farmgate in the city. The accident also left 25 passengers of the two buses injured.

Of them, eight were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) while the rest were treated at different medicare centres. Those undergoing treatment at the DMCH include Shameem Sattar, Halim, Zahurul Huq, Jalil, Sabuj and Azizunnessa.

Drivers and their assistants of the buses escaped after the accident that took place at 11 am. Police seized both the buses.

A case was lodged with the Tejgaon police and the body of the victim was sent to the DMCH morgue.

Our Comilla Correspondent told over telephone that, at least two persons were killed and 50 others wounded in separate road accidents on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway yesterday.

In one accident that took place at Ishanagar of Choudhagram thana at eight in the morning, a Chittagong-bound bus skidded off the road and fell into a roadside ditch leaving 25 of its passengers injured.

Another accident occurred when a Dhaka-bound bus collided head-on with a taxicab at Nimsarabad on the same highway at about 4 in the afternoon.

Biman's DC-10

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The flight was delayed by one and a half hours due to bad weather in Muscat.

"There was a clear sky when we took off at around 11:30 pm. There was no forecast of any storm from the control tower but our computer showed stall warning immediately after the takeoff," the pilot said.

Stall warning suggests that an aircraft is going to stop in mid-air.

Captain Akhter said "It was a rare incident. Usually in such circumstances an aircraft crashes even before the pilot can understand what's happening."

Two of my helping hands — First Officer Jamal and flight engineer, Faisal — were very alert and this helped us take prompt actions, the pilot said.

None of the passengers could understand what had happened. "God saved us," he said.

When contacted over telephone, a senior official of Biman's engineering department said "The aircraft is now safe to fly. We received it in good condition."

"But we will keep it on limited operation to check the engine thoroughly," he said.

In May last year a Biman DC-10 overshoot the runway and skidded off at the city's Zia Airport while coming in from Jeddah but all passengers and crew escaped unhurt.

Two passengers of the taxi were killed instantly while 25 bus passengers received injuries, two of them seriously — Shamima Akhter, 17, and her brother Tariq Hossain, 28, of Chhagalnaiya, Feni. They were admitted to the Comilla Sadar Hospital. The rest were sent to different clinics.

Meanwhile, a UNB report said, Nazrul Islam, a labourer, was killed and six others were injured seriously when a passenger train hit a stone-loaded truck at the Court Tali level crossing near Patgram Railway Station of Lalmonirhat district yesterday morning.

The injured admitted to the Rangpur Medical College Hospital, were identified as Abdus Samad, 32, Mofiz, 26, Salam, 25, and Shahedur, 30, of Patgram and Abdullah, 28, and Aisar, 65 of Dahagram.

There was, reportedly, no gateman at the level-crossing during the accident, the report said.

The driver and the helper of the truck fled the scene. A case was filed with Patgram police.

Tagore

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poet in the Bangla language. The Shipakala Academy has organised a discussion meeting to be followed by a cultural function at its auditorium at seven this evening.

Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Dhaka University Prof Wakil Ahmed will attend the programme as chief guest while noted poet Abdul Mannan Syed will also speak on the occasion.

Renowned exponents of Tagore Songs and reciters will participate in the cultural function.

The Bangla Academy will hold a discussion on "Easterism, Colonialism and Rabin-drath" at the academy premises at 5 pm today. Dr. Masuduzzaman will present the keynote paper on the topic while Prof. Khaliquzzaman Ilias and Prof. Biswajit Ghosh will take part in the discussions. Prof. Anisuzzaman will be in the chair.

The discussion will be followed by a musical soiree.

Bombay bombing

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ted the 13 bombs that exploded across central Bombay on March 12, 1993, after Hindu-Muslim riots swept India.

Friday's arrest marked the first arrest of the alleged inner circle of the conspiracy. In Bombay, the trial has begun of 147 defendants, but most were accused of playing minor roles in the bombing and were not involved in the planning. Another 45 are fugitives.

The Menon family reportedly fled their home in Bombay shortly before the bombs heavily damaged the stock market, office buildings, apartments and luxury hotels in the city.

Memon was captured by security agencies this morning at New Delhi railway station. Chavan said, adding that documents recovered from him "confirm the complicity of Pakistan in these blasts."



Qul-Khwani

Qul-Khwani of Alhaj Abdus Sattar Chowdhury of Gopalganj will be held today after Asr prayers at 23/1 Wayer Street, Wari. All relatives, friends and admirers are requested to attend.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd, 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035. GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA.

Slum at DMC

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sion project because of unauthorised occupation of land," he said.

The ADB has already listed it as a sick project because its implementation is yet after two and a half years.

"We did not add anything new to the 46-year old hospital and it is now going to miss a good chance for its expansion," Chowdhury regretted.

He apprehended that the session jam in the college may prolong further if the present impasse persists. The college is running one year behind scheduled, he said.

The principal, however, appreciated the role of the employees and the students in reaching a consensus on resolving the issue.

Mustafizul Azim Jami, VP of the College Students Union, said that the slum a spot of anti-social activities.

He alleged that hospital medicines are smuggled into the slum and later sold in the market. Police recovered medicines worth about Tk 27 lakh from the slum recently, he added. Many drug addicts also take shelter in the slum, he claimed.

The slum dwellers vitiated the atmosphere at the college and the hostel, he said.

The students union VP said the college authorities had to pay Tk 27 lakh as electricity bill and Tk 56 lakh as water bill for one year, mainly because of the slum dwellers.

Divorce law

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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 Rahmatullah 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.

Jami said that to avoid session jam, the students were ready to attend classes in night shift but "They want slum dwellers to go first."

The latest agreement with the employees is a positive step for resolving the issue, he said.

Vice-President of the Class Four Employees Union Abul Kalam told The Daily Star "The employees did not like to lead a miserable life in the slum, so they demanded rehabilitation in other areas."

He said that some 500 out of the 1,200 employees are now living in the 'Geneva camp' like slum.

Abul Kalam claimed that following the agreement they have evicted at least 30 outsiders living as tenants in the slum.

He admitted that a number of people in the slum were involved in criminal activities but they were identified and expelled from the area.

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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west of Sarajevo. Further escalating tensions, Serb soldiers later fired at a UN helicopter and blocked a UN road patrol, both sent out to track the tank.

Maj. Dacre Holloway, a UN spokesman, said the tank and an APC had been parked near a hospital and a school.

Until now, NATO has not used air strikes around Sarajevo. But it launched three strikes in April on Serb targets around the eastern Muslim enclave of Gorazde, where a similar exclusion zone was later imposed.

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.

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

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 Shahjibazar.

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

Child artists

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many good things, including "education," Begum Zia said. "A happy and prosperous country can be built only when we will be able to ensure equal rights and opportunity for all children."



Meher Afroze Shaon ... "Kha" Group champion