

DOWN TO EARTH

Misuse of govt facilities on rise

By A S M Nurunnabi

In the "To the Editor" column of this paper, a writer recently alleged that once again, misuse of transports of government and public sector corporations was on the rise. He elaborated that most of the time — before, after and between pick up and drop off from residence to offices, transports of government and corporations are misused by the family members of the entitled officers.

One can see quite a good number of such vehicles in front of educational institutions and some important markets of the city. This irregularity is alleged to be covered up by recording fictitious entries in the log books of those transports. This is said to be practised due to absence of any proper checking.

During the previous regime, for some period of time, some sort of control over such misuse was in evidence; government vehicles had red number plates and the public sector corporations' transports had blue number plates. The traffic police was also alert to check any misuse of these vehicles on the basis of number plates. But at the end of that regime, this system of separate colours of number plates for official transports was abolished. One reason advanced for such a step was said to be that during widespread agitation against that regime official transports, easily identified by the colour of their number plates, came under frequent attacks by agitators.

Nowadays there is a common black number plate for all transports — both public and private. It is now difficult to distinguish between a government and a private vehicle. Observers think that this lack of distinguishing mark on official transports is one of the main causative factors for their misuse. They are of the opinion that the authorities concerned should think of re-introducing separate colours for the number plates of official transports. This may ensure some extent of control and check on the misuse of government vehicles. This may also bring about a substantial reduction in the system loss in the transport sector.

We are all aware that the government subsidises heavily

the use of government transports by the eligible officers. It is not known if any government in the world at present so heavily subsidises the use of government vehicles by its officials as in this country where it has already been seen that the dividing line between private and official use is very thin. The picture in the corporations and autonomous bodies is almost the same, if not worse.

In the opinion of observers, the big expenditure on the transport head can be substantially slashed if the government grant adequate interest-free motor car advance to its officials to be recoverable in easy instalments. Those officials who would take advantage of this facility may be allowed appropriate motor car allowance. It is believed that this policy may bring about substantial economy in expenditure.

However, what is more urgently needed is to develop and improve the public transport system which is at present in a mess. If we can manage to organise an efficient public transport system, there may be no need to provide any special group or class with transport facilities. Observers also suggest that government may have second thoughts on a facility which is tantamount to bureaucratic luxury for a poor country like Bangladesh. If China as well as some neighbouring countries can make do with bicycles practically for all — from the highest to the lowest, why should we spend so lavishly by subsidy on a system of personal comfort for officials which is a contradiction to our wretchedness in most respects.

The use of telephones is another area where both government and private bodies suffer a great deal. It is generally observed that some persons have predilection for using other's phones free of charge. They may be guests, friends or just visitors. Whenever the owner of the phone turns his back, these opportunists lose no time in making unauthorised calls. If such calls are on the STD, the owners feel the pinch when they receive fat bills later.

Certain categories of officials of government and corporations are entitled to residential phones. The bills for such phones are paid by the respective authorities within prescribed limits. But it is common knowledge that with most of the residential phones, the prescribed ceilings are never followed and there is no checking if the concerned officials are at fault in this respect. No step is also taken to recover the excess amount if the bill exceeds the prescribed limit. As a result, the use of such phones is generally a free-for-all and it puts a heavy burden on public exchequer.

A great deal of government expenditure can be saved if regular control and supervision of the expenditure on account of residential telephone bills are exercised by the authorities in order to ensure compliance with the prescribed ceilings of such expenditure.

It has been observed that some cycle rickshaws of the city sometime carry three instead of two persons which is the normal load. The rickshaw pullers invariably agree to carry the extra burden on the incentive of extra payment. But neither those passengers nor the pullers, nor even the traffic police seem to realise the hazard such practice involves to the safety of the passengers and the pullers themselves.

The city is already suffering from the nightmare of the vast numbers of these delicate contraptions as they inch their way through crowded roads in many busy areas. Such overloaded rickshaws naturally get slowed down in their movement, adding to the traffic congestion.

The carrying of an extra passenger is definitely against the rules. But strangely enough, the traffic police is indifferent to it even when such overloaded rickshaws pass before their eyes. Instances of such practices, although not very common except in some specific areas, involve a risk factor because the overload interferes with effective control of movement of the vehicle and as such, from the safety point of view, it is felt that such practices should be strictly discouraged by the traffic authority.

SC rejects Sanjay Dutt's bail plea

NEW DELHI, Aug 12: Top movie star Sanjay Dutt, charged in India's biggest criminal trial, will stay in jail after the Supreme Court rejected his bail plea today, reports Reuters.

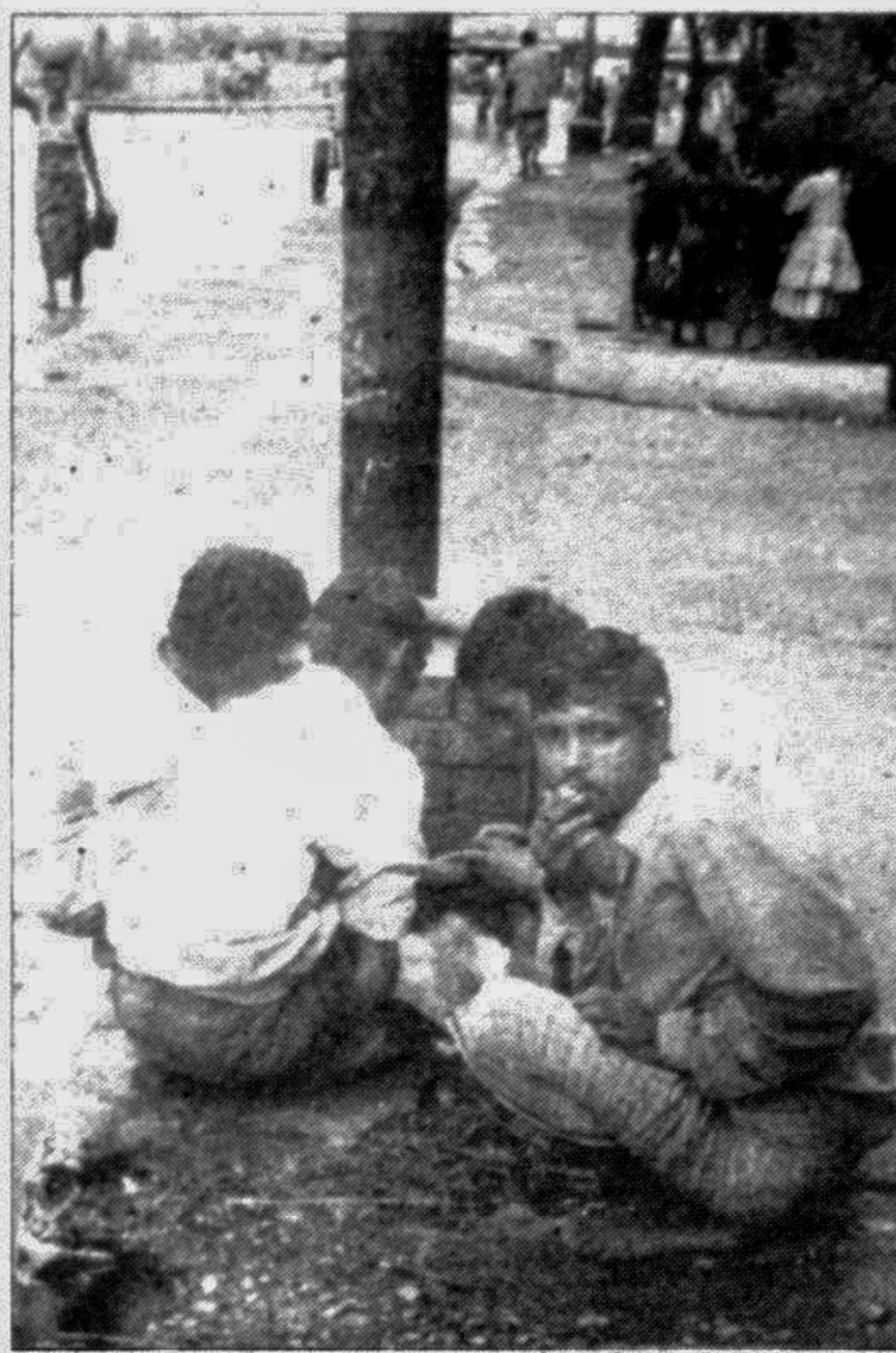
But it referred the bail application and the constitutional issues raised by Dutt's lawyer to a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court.

Orders defining the issues to be decided by the constitution bench would be announced on August 18, the court said after day-long arguments from Dutt's counsel, Ram Jethmalani, one of India's top lawyers.

The actor, rearrested on July 4, is charged with possessing an assault rifle and a 9mm pistol allegedly given to him by men charged with a Bombay bombing campaign in March 1993 that killed more than 260 people.

He was first arrested and charged in April 1993 and later given bail, which was cancelled by the special court set up to try 194 people in connection with bombings.

The Supreme Court said it was not convinced by Jethmalani's argument that Dutt acquired the weapons for self defence after bloody rioting swept through Bombay in January 1993.



These four addicts are seen openly taking drugs on the sidewalk of a city street yesterday. — Star photo

US-DPRK joint statement awaits approval

GENEVA, Aug 12: US and North Korean experts have concluded a joint statement on Pyongyang's nuclear programme and are awaiting approval of it by their respective capitals, a North Korean diplomat said today, reports Reuters.

The diplomat said the text dealt with establishing normal relations between Pyongyang and Washington in return for North Korea freezing its nuclear programme. The statement also covered providing North Korea with a safer light-water reactor.

US delegates have been trying to negotiate a deal under which North Korea — accused by Washington of diverting nuclear weapons material from its power programme — switches from graphite reactors to light-water technology that produces less bomb-making plutonium.

But the diplomat would not say whether the agreement dealt with the fate of 8,000 spent nuclear fuel rods removed from a reactor at

GENEVA, Aug 12: North Korea called in the American delegation for fresh negotiations on their nuclear standoff, in a last-minute hitch to the two sides signing a joint statement. Washington has approved the draft text but Pyongyang had not given the green light, US officials told Reuters here this evening.

Yongbyon in May which Washington want sent abroad for reprocessing.

The rods, which nuclear experts say could soon pose a radiation and fire risk, have been at the top of the US delegation's agenda in a week of talks in Geneva.

The expert-level meetings concluded the issue of making

provision of a light-water reactor, establishing normal relations between the DPRK and US and other issues, in return for freezing nuclear activities of the DPRK, the diplomat who did not wish to be named told Reuters.

They are now awaiting endorsement from the capitals. US officials declined comment on the joint statement and in separate remarks, US delegation chief Robert Gallucci appeared downbeat about progress in the negotiations.

Gallucci told Reuters television that expert working groups over the past two days had been trying to capture in writing those areas of agreement between us.

Contradicting a statement by the North Korean diplomat that the expert-level meetings were now over, he said the working groups could resume Friday.

The Midnight File

Talks for Israeli pullout from Golan Heights

JERUSALEM, Aug 12: Israel and Syria are negotiating a time frame for a full Israeli withdrawal from the disputed Golan Heights, Israel television's Channel Two reported Friday. According to the report, the United States is proposing a two-year Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, a compromise between the four-year withdrawal that Rabin has offered and the one-year withdrawal that Assad wants. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Friday that he had not heard of any such proposal, reports AP.

Lankan death toll rises to 73

COLOMBO, Aug 12: At least 73 persons, including 21 security personnel were killed in Sri Lanka's northeastern provinces in clashes between government forces and the LTTE guerrillas threatening the conduct of polls in the island's troubled parts, reports today said. Military sources said at least 52 LTTE militants were killed in a gunbattle in the northeastern region while 21 security personnel died in clashes with the militants during the last 48 hours, reports PTI.

Opposition has impeded

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Khan, and DUCSU AGS Nazimuddin Alam and JCD president Fazlul Haq Milan spoke on the occasion.

Begum Zia said that the people were already deriving the fruits of development programmes initiated by her government, saying "the BNP has almost fulfilled all its election pledges."

Referring to the 19-point programme of the BNP government, she lamented that much more could have been attained had the development

process not been hindered by the opposition during the last three and a half years.

BSS adds: Begum Zia last night underscored the need for imparting political training to the party leaders and workers to enable them to pursue the party's ideals and programmes to the people more effectively.

She was talking to a group of 30 leaders and workers of the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, the labour wing of the BNP, who are taking part in a two-day training programme on politics.

Earlier the BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdus Salam Talukder inaugurated the training programmes organised by the BNP Training Centre at the party central office.

The BNP chairperson said it is necessary that a political party should have an ideal organisation and programmes and should organise training to keep the people aware of its ideals and activities.

Begum Zia underscored more political training for her party leaders and workers to maintain consistency in their statements and actions, thereby making the party stronger and more effective.

The BNP chairperson said the leaders and workers should have a clear idea about the ideals of the BNP based on Bangladeshi nationalism.

Hasina

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power is impossible," the AL chief said.

Hasina said that if voted to power her party would work for economic emancipation of the masses.

Reiterating her demand for repealing the Indemnity Act that barred the trial of Sheikh Mujib's killers, Hasina said, "No power on the earth can stop the trial."

The AL chief also called for observing a half-day hartal throughout the country on August 15 to press for repeal of the Indemnity Act and to establish rule of law in the country.

Mayor of Dhaka Mohammad Hanif, AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman, Dr Hayat Mahmud, Abdul Kader Siddiqi and Abdul Latif Siddiqi also spoke on the occasion.

Meanwhile, thousands of people placed wreaths, offered feteha and attended milad mahfil at the mazar of Sheikh Mujib. Special prayers were also offered after Jum'a prayers at all mosques here today for the peace of the departed souls of Mujib and his family members.

RU VC panel

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Prof Umar Ali (Chemistry) 47 votes.

The pro-BNP White Panel candidates including incumbent Vice-Chancellor Prof Anisur Rahman, Pro-VC Prof M Azharuddin and Prof Altaf Hossain (Zoology) polled 33, 36 and 23 votes respectively.

Awami League-backed Yellow Panel candidates Prof S R Khan (Sociology), Prof M Kausuddin (Bio-chemistry) and Prof Abul Fazal Huq (Political Science) could manage only six votes each.

Ninety-two out of 94 voters cast their ballots in the election held today, the first day of the two-day 15th senate session of the university.

Another Green Panel candidate, Dr M Nazrul Islam, was elected Syndicate member from the non-senator 'Prominent Citizen' category.

He polled 44 votes. Dr Kaiser Rahman Chowdhury of the White Panel got 39 votes and Abul Hossain of the Yellow Panel six votes.

Dr Delwar Hossain, also of the Green Panel, was elected senate representative to the finance committee securing 49 votes. Prof Sadekul Islam of the White Panel bagged 32 votes and prof A H M Jehdul Karim of the Yellow Panel received nine votes.

Tasneem Alam, a former leader of the Jamaat's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir, has been elected Syndicate member unopposed from among the registered graduate representatives.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Anisur Rahman presided over the senate session which began at 10:07 am through recitation for the holy Quran.

Eleven senate members boycotted the meeting for three minutes protesting the presence of Dr Ershadul Bari and Prof Azharuddin.

The senate meeting concluded the deaths of Jahanara Imam, eminent litterateur Mohammad Nasiruddin, journalist S M Alim and former Vice Chancellor of the Agriculture University Prof Ashraf Ali.

After the adoption of obituary references, all present excepting the pro-Jamaat senators stood up and observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect to the distinguished personalities. Later, prayer was also offered for the departed souls.

Petrobangla

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the experts suggested an alternative plan to carry on the exploration.

Under this plan, the costly drilling string will be abandoned and the drill-pipe will be sealed a few hundred meters above the high-pressure zone.

"The depth is already enough to look for natural resources," authoritative sources said.

By perforating the existing drill-pipe, experts would examine four sub-soil zones at a depth ranging from 3,170 metres to 3,307 metres.

When contacted, Managing Director of Bapex Dr Mohammad Ismail said "We have already traced some non-commercial diagenetic gas zones at shallow depths. But what we are looking for are commercial reserves under a depth of 3000 metres."

"We have to wait for the final outcome of the operation to determine the commercial feasibility," he said.

The drilling programme involving an initial estimated expenditure of Tk 30 crore was taken up depending completely on local expertise and it was progressing smoothly until the sub-soil over-pressure interrupted it.

Student bodies

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Khan, Proctor of the DU Dr Nazrul Islam was also present at the meeting.

The leaders of the feuding JCD and BCL (M-I) had a meeting yesterday morning, GCO leaders were also present.

The student leaders reached a consensus and took some decisions at that meeting which were finally welcomed at the meeting with the VC.

The students decided to solve their problems through discussion among themselves.

Besides they also agreed not to shelter the terrorists on political grounds to save the educational institutions from terrorism.

The student leaders, however, decided not to obstruct organisational activities of any student body.

Democracy will take roots

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plan to continue to support the process of democratisation through diplomatic efforts and assistance to strengthen institutions including Parliament, the courts and the press," Raphael said.

Another area of importance to the United States in South Asian countries is economic growth and development resulting in large part from liberalisation of trade and investment policies, she said.

"Closely connected to this is our strong interest in generating new opportunities for American business," she added.

The Assistant Secretary of State said that Bangladesh has made significant progress in providing electricity and a fertiliser distribution system to rural areas.

A country once called a 'basket case' is now self-sufficient in rice production, ambassador Raphael said.

On the economic front, she added, the United States continues to encourage and support the on-going process of reform and development.

Since Bangladesh's independence in 1971, Raphael said, US assistance has helped Bangladesh reduce its population growth rate from three per cent to 2.3 per cent.

Infant death rates, she added, have gone down from 200 per thousand to less than 100 per thousand.

The United States, she said, has two primary objectives in Bangladesh: Promoting democracy and respect for human rights and encouraging continued economic growth and development.

As a result of reforms already made, she said, inflation is down and foreign currency reserves have increased.

Bangladesh, she said, achieved notable success in curbing population growth rates and half the country's population today is under the age of 15.

She said that dramatic economic growth will be needed to generate sufficient jobs.

The US, she said, felt happy that increasing number of Bangladeshis are accepting greater role for the private sector in the economy as the

surest way to increase the rate of economic growth and development.

The Assistant Secretary of State said that India has a special obligation to ensure its smaller neighbours feel that they are treated fairly.

Water allocation, power generation and refugee flows are among the significant issues between the smaller neighbours of South Asia and

Mostafiz

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power to Brunel, augmenting Bangladesh-Brunel trade cooperation and exploring the prospect of Brunel's investment in Bangladesh.

After his official visit to Brunel, Mostafiz will lead the Bangladesh delegation to the second meeting of Bangladesh-Malaysia Joint Commission in Kuala Lumpur from August 17 to 19.

During the visit, the foreign minister is expected to call on Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and have an audience with the King, Tuanku Ja'afar Ibn Almarhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman, the Foreign Ministry added.

Ministries

From Page 1 Col 7

is scheduled to examine those made at the second and fourth sessions.

The sub-committee headed by Keramat Ali Talukder, started its work yesterday and the other will do so on August 20.

The ministries—whose pledges are scheduled to come under scrutiny—include Communications Ministry; Irrigation, Water Development and Flood Control; Local Government and Rural Development; Education; Post and Telecommunications; Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs; Youth and Sports and Civil Aviation ministries.

The House body members from the Awami League and the Jatiya Party have been keeping away from committee activities as part of their struggle for unseating the Khaleda Zia government.

India, she added.

The three states, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, she said, recognise the importance of regional cooperation and are strong supporters of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The United States also would like to see SAARC grow in stature and effectiveness, she said.

Splits in Nepal's governing Congress Party brought a collapse of the government last month. But the Nepalis appreciate fully the significance of this test to their democratic institutions, she reported.

The US Embassy in Kathmandu is urging all parties to forego violence, and they are showing restraint and seem committed to participating in the election process, and operating within the framework of the constitution.

"Prospects are good for free and fair elections Nov 13 and senior Nepalese officials have indicated they would welcome international observers," Raphael said.

Raphael said Sri Lanka's government is reluctant to risk peace initiatives in the island's prolonged ethnic conflict until after parliamentary elections next week and year end presidential voting.

After a new government is installed, US efforts will be resumed toward a political settlement between the Sinhalese-dominated government and Tamil separatists, she said.

Confidence-building measures and 'much preparatory work' are needed before meaningful negotiations can occur, she added limiting opportunities for US or other outside mediation.

But the human rights situation has improved in Sri Lanka, Raphael said, with disappearance of people dropping from thousands annually before 1991 to 200 in 1992 and about 70 the first nine months of 1993.

"By all accounts the democratic process is thriving in Sri Lanka, where a 47-year-old functioning democracy has been severely tested by ongoing civil war and the assassination during 10 days last year of both the president and a main opposition leader, Raphael said.

The government has requested foreign observers for parliamentary elections this month and is likely to do so again for the year end presidential elections, she said.



Two Palestinian mothers seeking the release of their sons, who were arrested following riots, argue with an Israeli officer in the West Bank town of Hebron yesterday. — AFP photo

Plane seized, 3 arrested Attempt to smuggle huge arms to Y'slavia

KIEV, Aug 12: A group trying to smuggle more than four tons of ammunition to the former Yugoslavia was arrested by Ukrainian authorities who also seized the plane and cargo, officials said today, reports AP.

Three men, two Ukrainians and a Pole, were charged Tuesday with attempting to break the United Nations embargo on the sale of weapons to the former Yugoslavia.

Officials refused to say where the arms were headed, but Ukrainians have expressed support for their fellow Slavs in Serbia.

The men face prosecution for "attempting to illegally transport through Ukraine's borders over 200,000 cartridges... to a zone of armed conflict in Yugoslavia," the National Security Ministry said.

They bought four and a half tons of Ukrainian-made ammunition legally in the former Soviet republic and hired a Ukrainian-owned Antonov-26 cargo-plane which they intended to fly to Kenya, he said. From there, the ammunition was to have been shipped to Yugoslavia.

AFP from Sarajevo adds:

Police wants to question Malaysian woman

By Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka Cantonment police is likely to submit a prayer to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) today seeking permission to interrogate Malaysian woman Ong Siew Piw, charged with carrying unauthorised foreign currency.

A leading Malaysian entrepreneur, Ong Siew Piw was held with 20,000 US dollars and 10,800 ringgit (Malaysian currency) at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) Tuesday night just before trying to leave for Singapore. She was detained at the airport overnight and released on a bond, furnished by a Malaysian High Commission official, the following day.

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Reuter adds: United Nations troops in Bosnia are likely to withdraw if the arms embargo on the Muslim-led Bosnian government is lifted, a UN spokesman said today.

2 Sarbaharamen held in Magura

MAGURA, Aug 12: Police arrested the alleged regional commander of the outlawed Sarbahara Party, Rubel, 30, and his accomplice Hanidul, 22, from a house in Magura town on Thursday night, reports UNB.