

DOWN TO EARTH

Worsening Environmental Situation in the Capital

By ASM Nurunnabi

Of late environmental issues have assumed importance the world over. In this context, it is gratifying to note that government is reportedly considering to enact appropriate legislation for the protection and maintenance of proper environment in the country. The draft legislation is said to be already on the anvil in consultation with appropriate quarters including the chambers of commerce particularly in respect of industry-related environmental pollution.

According to a World Bank report, the level of environmental degradation in East and South Asia is rapidly approaching thresholds of unacceptably high economic and social costs. Around the world more than one billion people live in cities where the air quality does not meet World Health Organisation (WHO) standards. So far as the Dhaka City is concerned, there is little doubt that it suffers from a great deal of environmental degradation in its various aspects.

Not that there are no existing laws for the protection of environment. There may be some lacunae or loopholes in them; but what is most distressing is the absence of due active role of the authorities concerned in enforcing them when violations take place. From that perspective, the proposed legislation is expected to be more effective to meet the needs of the time.

The air pollution caused by the Dhaka city's transportation system is a cause of great concern for us. With the steady growth of motor traffic on the roads in the city, the threat of pollution from this source keeps on increasing at an alarming rate. According to a survey conducted by the Department of Environment, commercial vehicles are worst offenders in this respect. The prime need of the hour is the constant vigilance and commitment of the concerned authorities to tackle smoke pollution for the betterment of environment and the preservation of public health.

The elementary step in city sanitation is regular clearance of garbage. But it has gone completely awry. According to observers, except for the areas around the VIP roads, the areas close to most other roads

in almost all other places in both new and old Dhaka literally stink and present the most distressing sights of heaps of uncleaned garbage. Nearly most other road corners are littered with such festering garbage.

In most of the areas outside the posh and semi-posh areas in the new part of the city, the conditions of life and living are most pitiable. Particularly in old Dhaka there is a good number of enclaves of poverty and squalor. Even outside old Dhaka, such localities as Central Road, parts of Jigatola, Naya Paltan, Fakirapool, Bejoynagar and Segun Bagicha present a picture of unredeemed filthy environs. Besides, the steadily deteriorating conditions in the existing slums and simu-slums are having a deleterious effect on the over-all sanitation of the city.

There has been no lack of media publicity about the poor functioning of the city's drainage system. The total situation in this respect is so wretched that it is the biggest single cause of pollution of environment and a direct threat to health and sanitation of the city's population.

The main thoroughfares all over the city become submerged even after a moderate shower, and the rain water remains stagnant for hours because of the faulty drainage. With the passage of time, the problems of water logging are going from bad to worse.

The sanitation situation is further made pitiable by the city's time-worn sewerage system. Some of the underground sewers date back to the twenties of the century. The underground storm sewer lines remain choked in many parts of the city because of lack of routine cleaning of the pipes and the pits.

In 1992 the government announced the adoption of a comprehensive plan for removing water logging from the sprawling metropolis. The work on the project also began. But with the onset of monsoon last year, work on the project virtually remained suspended. The drainage division of WASA, entrusted with the task of implementing storm sewer project has given no explanation why it could not complete the work on

schedule. Experts have predicted that the fate of the metropolis is bleak if emergency steps are not taken to solve the problem of water logging. It is apprehended that our failure in this respect may turn at least half of the present 260 square kilometre of the city into a swamp by the beginning of 2000 AD.

DCC, WASA, DESA and other urban service agencies in the city seem to have developed an insensibility to public complaints and to the suffering caused by their failure in delivering their services. On account of their apparent default in giving due priority in their respective areas, the utilities and sanitation services of the city appear to have stayed stuck.

Another aspect of environmental degradation is growing noise pollution. Among the factors responsible are lack of proper planning in urban growth, existence of noise-creating industries and enterprises in areas mainly residential and recreational in character within city limits and absence of awareness among city dwellers of the consequences stemming from constant exposure to noisy environment.

The burgeoning process of urbanisation has claimed among its victims the cruel denudation of trees in many areas of the city. This is inevitably leading to environmental degradation. There is, therefore, necessity for intensifying drive for greening city areas as a means of achieving upgradation.

With the multi-faceted problems of environmental degradation noted above, the city does not compare favourably with other metropolitan cities of the region. While the city's population continues to grow rapidly and with it the absolute insufficiency of its facilities and amenities, the existing infrastructure has miserably failed to meet the challenge posed by the steadily deteriorating situation. As a result, the city is increasingly wearing the look of a city in decay. This makes the citizenry wonder why this should be allowed to happen disappointing the high hopes raised by the election of a new mayor of the Dhaka City Corporation.



A leftist activist brandishes a flag as she is led into a police van in Kathmandu yesterday. More than 600 activists, including ex-MPs, were arrested as demonstrators clashed with police in a communist-led protest against Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.— AFP photo

No Bangladeshi killed in Algerian quake

So far no news of any loss of lives of Bangladesh nationals in the earthquakes in Algeria was received by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reports BSS.

The ministry sources said that the government is trying to collect information if any Bangladeshi was affected by the earthquake and added that no such information was available so far.

Mostafiz returns home

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to pay an official visit to Malaysia from October 11-13. Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman said in Dhaka yesterday, reports UNB.

Talking to newsmen at the Zia International Airport on his return from a six-day visit to Brunei and Malaysia last night, Mostafiz said his talks with Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Badawi covered the PM's planned visit to Malaysia.

He described his trip as "most successful", saying "It has opened up a new era of co-operation between Bangladesh and the two ASEAN countries."

In the first leg of his visit, the Foreign Minister had travelled to the oil-rich tiny state of Brunei from August 14-16. He then proceeded to Kuala Lumpur to lead the Bangladesh delegation to the second meeting of Bangladesh-Malaysia Joint Commission (JC).

He said the two South-East Asian countries would recruit more Bangladeshis manpower.

The Malaysian government has given the assurance to take immediate steps to remove sufferings of the Bangladesh workers by issuing identity cards to them, Mostafiz said.

He said the JC has decided to expand cooperation between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur, particularly in trade and economic fields.

Demonstration against Koirala Hundreds held in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Aug 19: Several thousand Communist activists clashed with police after attacking government buildings and setting fire to official and diplomatic cars in Kathmandu today, witnesses said, reports AFP.

Police arrested 3,000 people during skirmishes around the latest anti-government demonstrations, the Communist Party said in a statement.

Among those detained were Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) leader, Man Mohan Adhikari, and other party officials, who were later released, they said.

The police said only 400 were detained and all but eight had since been released. But the Communists said all but 100 remained in detention.

The statement said there were several injured in the clashes outside the main government buildings.

Riot police cordoned off the central secretariat buildings. But the Communists attacked around 25 cars belonging to government officials and the Pakistan, South Korean and Russian embassies as well as the United Nations representative, witnesses said.

They added that during the violence protesters had hurled stones at a police club, smashing the windows.

There were two hours of street battles with police who used tear gas and baton charges to break up the demonstration against the administration of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

Shantibahini Strike at a Sylhet gas field

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include Rupayan Dewan, Raktautal Chakma and Sudasini Khisa.

Meanwhile, in pursuance of the precondition set by the rebel leaders, government had decided to remove eight security camps and keep five others inoperative along the Panchari border five days ahead of the August 28 talks to ensure free movement of the rebel leaders to and from their sanctuary across the border. The camps will be relocated three days after the talks.

The second round of informal talks between the sub-committee and the leaders of the armed rebels who have been waging an insurrection since the seventies, was held on July 10 at the same venue.

The decision for holding such talks with the Shantibahini leaders was taken at the seventh round of formal peace talks between the two teams held on May 5 at the Khagrachhari Circuit House.

From Our Correspondent SYLHET, Aug 19: More than one hundred master-roll employees of two wells of the Kailashita Gas Field, have begun an indefinite strike from today.

They are demanding the removal of an allegedly corrupt officer of the Sylhet Gas Fields Limited.

Striking employees also wore black badges to press home their demand.

One shot dead in Mongla

BAGERHAT, Aug 19: A boatman was killed during a scuffle with Ansars near Pashur Channel in Mongla early hours today, police and hospital sources said, reports UNB.

Ali Hossain, 25, died on the spot and his body was sent to the Bagerhat Hospital for post-mortem.

Women in Bangladesh get less facilities: UN study

Women in Bangladesh do not work less than men but they fare worse than male on almost every measure, says a United Nations study, reports UNB.

As a whole womanfolk, mother, sister, wife and daughter in Bangladesh get less food, education, health care and all other social facilities, according to the study conducted by several UN bodies recently.

Women in Bangladesh get less education: The female literacy rate is only 23 per cent compared to 30 per cent for males.

They get less health care: Medical expenditure in the typical household is 45 per cent on women and 55 per cent on men. Women get less food, consuming on average 20 per cent fewer calories than men.

Bangladesh is rated one of the few countries in the world where women on average die younger than men. There are only 945 females for every 1,000 males — an estimated 3 million women are 'missing', the study report reveals.

Discrimination against women starts at birth. A new boy is considered a future breadwinner while a girl is temporary guest who will leave home at marriage.

The report states that boys get preferential treatment in Bangladesh and girls are taught to be self-sacrificing. Girls usually eat last and least, and they are twice as likely to be malnourished as boys.

Parents in the country take girls to health centres less often than boys and as a result, the death rate for children aged 1-4 are 14 per cent for boys but 24 per cent for girls.

The UN study found that poor nutritional status of women marked 40 per cent of their pregnancies to high risk. The greatest danger for women in Bangladesh occur during pregnancy and childbirth. Around 15 per cent of all female deaths are related to pregnancy — 30,000 a year.

Poor nutrition, inadequate health care and large numbers of closely spaced pregnancies, all steadily take their toll and give Bangladeshi women one of the highest maternal mortality ratios in the world — 490 per 100,000 live births in rural areas.

A Labour Force Survey revealed that 29 per cent of urban women were economically active and for rural women the figure was 70 per cent. Women here also work longer hours than men.

Even in male-headed households, women's earnings can contribute between 25 per cent and 50 per cent of family income.

The UN experts remarked that Bangladesh cannot afford to ignore the potential of half of its population and that if women are more powerful the benefits for them and the whole society would be enormous.

The study mentioned that the government has given higher priority to women, considering women as a target group for all sectoral programmes in the fourth five year plan (1990-95).

But, it suggested that this 'Women in Development' strategy clearly permeate every sector of development, challenging existing gender relationships and leading to true and effective women's empowerment throughout the society.

The Midnight File

50 Tajik rebels killed

MOSCOW, Aug 19: At least 50 Tajik guerrillas were killed in an attack on a Russian-managed post on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, a Russian border guard official said today. Russian troops used Sukhoi-27 ground attack jets and attack helicopters to fight off the Muslim guerrillas' attack. General Nikolai Boryduzha was quoted by Interfax news agency as saying at a news conference, reports AFP.

Israel frees 247 Palestinians

JERICHO, Aug 19: Israel freed 247 Palestinian prisoners to PLO-ruled Jericho today but many said the joy of freedom was marred by the Jewish state's refusal to allow them to return to their homes in the still-occupied West Bank. The Palestinians were driven handcuffed on chartered buses from four West Bank prisons to Jericho, where they were handed over to Palestinian police, reports Reuter.

An appeal in earnest

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Madam Ndaye urged for immediate action from the international community, the Security Council of the United Nations, the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), from Amnesty International and the Human Rights Commission in undertaking investigations to expose the people who are preparing for war, whether they are in Burundi or outside (meaning neighbouring Rwanda).

She said, "Melchior Ndaye never dreamt of war. He had always worked for peace and for national reconciliation; he had fought to win respect for human rights and for the consolidation of democracy."

Continuing, she said, "As his wife and a mother, I dare to make an urgent appeal to the international community, the friendly countries represented at Bujumbura (the Burundi capital) and the European Community to prevent Burundi from being mired in the imminent war that is in preparation in this country."

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Diplomatic circles in Dhaka, while of noting the grave concern expressed by Madame Ndaye, also appreciated the growing international profile of Muhammad Yunus whose work for poverty alleviation has already drawn world-wide attention and acclaim.

Madame Ndaye, in her appeal, also requested "Urgent action from the government of Burundi is strongly supporting me and in facilitating these investigations which I consider fundamental to the politics of preventative diplomacy."

"I am convinced that it is not possible for the people to settle their differences through violence, war or massacres. I remain confident in those who choose to hear me and support me in warding off the danger that awaits the democracy of Burundi and all of Central Africa."

8 injured as cops, transport workers clash in Jhenidah

JHENIDAH, Aug 19: Six workers and two policemen were injured when transport workers clashed twice with police in the town today, reports UNB.

A police outpost and at least four vehicles were damaged during the clash, according to police and the transport workers.

Khaleda

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district BNP president Mohammad Shahjahan, the function was also addressed by Information Minister Nazmul Huda, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman, State Minister for Textile Maj (ret'd) Abdul Mannan, Barkatullah Bulu MP, Saluddin Kamran MP, Zainul Abedin Faruk MP, and BNP central leader Tanvir Ahmed Siddique. Referring to the "misrule" of the Awami League and the "autocratic regime" of the Jatiya Party, the Prime Minister said they (AL and JP) had betrayed with the people time and again.

"Speaking of democracy — doesn't suit them," Begum Zia said reminding the "failure" of those two regimes to provide food and clothing to the people.

Upholding the concept of 'dal bhat' for all, she expressed her confidence that with the continued politics of production, the present government would make further progress.

JU situation

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Savar police, however, are yet to unearth the mystery around the death of Quamrul Islam whose body was recovered by them Wednesday from the Dhaka-Aricha Highway near the JU.

Police said they were investigating the death of Quamrul filing a General Diary (GD) with the Savar Thana. "Whenever we'll find any clue, we'll turn the GD into a murder case", they said.

Meanwhile, the Jamaat-backed Islami Chhatra Shibir, at a press conference in the capital yesterday, alleged that Quamrul Islam was murdered by some Jatiyatibadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists of the JU.

Foreign trade

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The NTFC, headed by the Commerce Secretary, was formed in May last year. It had appointed a task force to frame new rules and procedures and prepare a report accordingly. The objective of setting up the NTFC was to streamline, modernise and simplify the import and export procedures.

The formation of such a committee was suggested at a workshop on trade facilitation, held in Dhaka in January 1992 under the joint sponsorship of the ESCAP and UNCTAD.

The Director General of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) was made convener of the task force, comprising representatives of the Bangladesh Bank, National Board of Revenue (NBR), Ministry of Shipping, Board of Investment, Chittagong Port Authority, leading chambers and trade associations.

The draft prepared by the task force has been sent to all departments concerned for vetting. After obtaining the report for adoption and implementation by the government.

Drought

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months before the winter crops come. "I have to wait till 'Chaital' (rabt crops). Only Allah knows how shall I survive that long," says Rashid. "Even with this scanty rain, we still could grow some crop with water from the Mahakandi canal. But this canal is also dry because of the dam."

The people of Singair are equally blaming the dam for the dryness of their fields and this is making them increasingly restive about the dam.

They allege the dam was erected at a cost of Tk seven lakh to protect the house of an influential person of Manikganj from river erosion. The tension has culminated in a bloody showdown on August 14 when thousands of people protested the construction of this dam. The skirmishes between the pro and anti-dam groups left one dead and 24 injured.

Following this, a committee was formed with the Deputy Commissioner of Manikganj, local UP chairman and some others to solve the issue. The committee met Wednesday last and decided to prepare a report on the dam within seven days, sources at the DC office said.

Meanwhile, the plight of the Singair people continues. "Mohammad Ali had a good jute harvest this year, but he is now finding it hard to rot the fibre. "Water is now scarce and so, the colour of jute is lost," he said pointing to the blackish colour of the fibre. "The water has become so contaminated that it causes scabies."

"Only 'Bhagaban' knows what will happen to me and my four children," says Bhakta Chandra Sarkar, who has lost his Aman paddy in the drought. "May be, I will have to work as a labourer. But will there be any work when the crop is lost?"

Hazrat Ali, an old farmer, laments "we had a good Aus cultivation this year, but when Aman is lost where shall we get seeds for the next season?"

But is there any answer to these questions of the Singair people?

N'ganj victim

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the body of Sohail after his name-e-janaza was held near the DIT market.

They blamed a local AL leader for anarchy and hooliganism in the town and demanded exemplary punishment to those involved in the violence.

Police deployment has been reinforced in the town with police vans patrolling the tense areas.

Violence first broke out on Monday at the August 15 'mourning day' function of the party at Baburail in the town.

More than 75 people were injured in a series of clashes during three days.

Because of the continued violence, the central committee of the AL suspended all activities of the district and town committees party.

Roushan Ali

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BKSAI in 1975.

Roushan Ali survives by his wife, three sons, four daughters and a host of relatives.

His name-e-janaza was held at Jessore Eidgah Maidan after Asr prayers. Later, his body was taken to his village Nadaga for burial at the family graveyard.



Md. Roushan Ali

Late Roushan Ali passed his matriculation from Somnilganj Institution in Jessore in 1939 and BA from Ripon College in Calcutta in 1953 under Calcutta University. He did his LLB from the same University in 1951 and joined the Jessore Bar in 1952. He was one of the founder members of the Jessore District Awami League.

Our Jessore correspondent further informs that Agriculture Minister Majedul Huq visited his residence yesterday morning to pay his tributes.

The Jessore Awami League has drawn up a 5-day programme to mourn his death.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali and Awami League chief and leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina, Post and Telecommunications Minister Tariqul Islam, Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Abdullah al-Noman, Shipping Minister MK Anwar, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Dr Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain, State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Harun al Rashid and Chief Whip Khondaker Delwar Hossain condoned the death of Roushan Ali MP.

Kumaratunga takes oath

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Party because its leader, Dingiri Banda Wijetunga, is the country's president and heads the defense ministry.

Tuesday's poll ended a 17-year rule by the United National Party, that was marked by rampant corruption and human rights abuses. But the government's free-market economic policies had created a booming economy fuelled by low import duties.

Kumaratunga, 49, said her government would continue the UNP's economic policies "but with a human face," spend more money on welfare programmes and education of women.

The government also would appoint inquiry commissions into the assassination of her actor-politician husband, Vijaya, in 1988 by Sinhalese radicals and the disappearance of about 60,000 people during a crackdown on leftists rebels in the south.

Kumaratunga, dressed in a blue sarai, the same color as her party's symbol, knelt before five Buddhist monks who chanted prayers for peace and prosperity.

Outside her home, supporters danced and hugged one another.

At 10.14 am (04.44 GMT), a time her astrologers had identified as auspicious, a motorcade took her to the president's palace for the swearing-in ceremony.

For the first time in three days, thousands of Sri Lankans shopped for bread and vegetables after police and soldiers dismantled roadblocks and lifted a round-the-clock curfew. But the government said the night curfew would continue indefinitely to prevent post-election violence.

The new government of 22 Cabinet ministers included Kumaratunga's mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, 72, who was the first woman in the world to be appointed as prime minister.

President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga kept the Defence portfolio while Kumaratunga took charge of Finance and

High command against return of Huda, Matin to JP

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The Jatiya Party presidium due to meet tomorrow is expected to reiterate the party's resolve to continue agitation relentlessly in support of the demand for elections under the caretaker government simultaneously with the Awami League and the Jamaat-Islami.

Disclosing this, a competent source close to the JP presidium confided to UNB yesterday that the party would run a parallel agitation programme from its own platform alongside the AL and the Jamaat.

The JP presidium, the source said, would also endorse the decision of its central working committee to impede the return of the deserters, including Shamsul Huda Chowdhury and Prof MA Matin, to the party.

The central working committee, which met last week at the Gulshan residence of JP acting chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, was learnt to have outright rejected any attempt at restoring party membership to the deserters.

Members, who attended the meeting, were reported to have recalled during discussion the 'perfidious' exit of Huda-Matin and their comrades from the organisation only two days before the fall of Ershad government.

After leaving the organisation, they reportedly established clandestine contact with the BNP high command to secure BNP nominations for them for the 1991 election to parliament.