

DOWN TO EARTH

Continuing Traffic Medley in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

Current life in Dhaka city is plagued with many ills, some of which are so serious and persistent that they seem to raise doubts whether we have a civilised existence. The two outstanding aspects of the malaise in the city life seem to be among other things, the mounting problems of traffic jams and road accidents.

Dhaka's traffic problems have always been a subject of exasperation. A lot of studies have already been made about their genesis, pattern and possible solutions. But proper remedial steps in the light of such studies do not seem to be much in evidence. There are more than five lakh vehicles — both motorised and non-motorised — that ply on the 2,231 km of city roads, at an average rate of 246 automobiles per minute at city centres. A survey shows that a typical jam in old Dhaka involving 100 vehicles for one and a half hours cost the road users about Tk 1.5 lakh.

The present state of traffic situation in the city leads to the inevitable conclusion that one of the main causative factors for the traffic clog is the unbridled proliferation of rickshaws. Since the rickshaws constitute the pillar of transport system for the common people, we can hardly think of their replacement in the near future in the absence of viable alternatives. The democratic character of a city is reflected, by and large, in its transport system, in which buses, trams, tube trains and other modes of mass transit are used by all classes of people, rich and poor alike. Given our background of lack of proper planning and coordinated remedial steps in this sector, it does not seem easy to evolve such an orderly transport system.

Another important factor contributing to the traffic jam is the squatter hawkers whose

burgeoning growth is a cause for concern for the traffic controllers. Recently, The Daily Star published a series of pictures of different areas of the city which showed in vivid light the enormity of the problem affecting city life.

Running parallel to the chaotic situation of rickshaws and hawkers is the disconcerting and horrific rise in road accidents which seem to be a daily affair. A feature of these road accidents is that they kill and the rate at which they do so is stunningly high. Sometimes it is said that road accidents in our country do not happen; rather they are made to happen. Perhaps there is some element of truth in the statement. For the observers, the conclusion seems inescapable that the roads and highways have turned into potential death traps for passengers making journeys along them and the engines of death include buses, trucks and particularly the drivers of these killer vehicles. Some of the factors readily identifiable as responsible for road accidents are rash driving, over-loading, ill-trained and sometimes over-worked drivers, grant of fitness certificates to defective vehicles, overtaking, violation of traffic rules and indifference and negligence in the enforcement of such rules. When these factors are, by and large overlooked by concerned quarters, it seems natural to think that accidents are made to happen and such road accidents have become endemic in our traffic system.

In the opinion of many, the situation has deteriorated to such an extent that it is widely believed that such frequent road accidents are the end result of a system that has ostensibly collapsed and nothing short of very stringent measures can be expected to help improve matters.

Lately we have seen some encouraging signs of government efforts to improve the traffic situation. Recently government reportedly took decisions to set up Highway Traffic Police Force and a separate police unit to check the rising trend of traffic accidents. The ministries and agencies concerned have also been instructed to immediately submit necessary project proposals to the Planning Commission for constructing flyovers and foot bridges and expansion and development of footpaths in the city to help reduce traffic jams. In the first phase, construction of flyovers at Mohakhali and Magbazar will take precedence.

A Task Force has also been constituted by government with the State Minister for Planning as chairman to identify measures for the formulation of necessary projects to end traffic jams in the city, besides the purposes of coordination.

Lately the Task Force held a meeting at which an immediate action plan covering such aspects as low cost over bridges, improvement of signal lights, pedestrian crossing facilities, regulation of proper bus stoppages and parking in some selected locations, improvement of enforcement capability of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police has been adopted for incorporation in a project for immediate implementation. A working group has been formed for monitoring the implementation of the immediate action programme.

Drawing up plans and programmes is not enough. What the suffering citizens of the Dhaka city will await with eagerness is how quickly and effectively the action programme is implemented showing concrete results in easing the traffic situation.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia being received by Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mirza Gholam Hafiz at Zia International Airport on her return from Malaysia yesterday. — PID photo

PM back home

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the existing trade gap. The imbalance is against Bangladesh.

"Malaysia agreed to import more from Bangladesh to reduce the trade gap," she said.

Begum Zia, looking satisfied at the success of the visit, said Malaysia will recruit 50,000 Bangladeshi workers each year. "They are ready to recruit 5,000 nurses immediately if we can provide them with proper training," the Prime Minister said.

She said she had requested the Malaysian authorities to recruit Bangladeshi doctors, engineers and other skilled professionals besides the workers. "She showed interest about physicians," she said. Information Minister Nazmul Huda and two members of her entourage Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman and Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, were present at the press conference.

Begum Zia said that she also had discussions with Malaysian business leaders who showed interest in investing in various sectors in Bangladesh.

She said the Bangladesh side proposed to convert the Machine Tools Factory at Gazipur into an exclusive export processing zone (EPZ) and invited the Malaysian investors to visit the sprawling factory. The cabinet had earlier decided to turn the factory into an EPZ because it had been incurring huge losses for a long time, she added.

The Prime Minister urged the journalists to help create a positive image of the country which would facilitate foreign investment.

"We all have some responsibilities. A section of newspapers published reports which sometime generate suspicion in the mind of the foreign investors," Begum Zia regretted.

When her attention was drawn to a report that a Malaysian cellular telephone company had to return because of a legal action by a company, said to be owned by one of her advisers, Begum Zia said, "I can not comment on the court order but I can assure you investment will not be affected here because of any individual."

Begum Zia said that the members of a team of businessmen and entrepreneurs, who accompanied her during the visit, held discussions with Malaysian business community to explore possibilities of investment and increased busi-

ness. She said that some of them stayed back in Malaysia to hold further discussions.

Begum Zia said that at the official talks Malaysia said that while recruiting expatriates it would give priority to Bangladeshi workers.

Malaysia, she said, was also keen to recruit physicians, engineers and other technical hands from Bangladesh.

She said she discussed the problems being faced by some Bangladeshi workers who remained stranded in Malaysia following their arrival with some irregularities.

She said that Malaysia already regularised some such cases and while assured that the same would be done for the others facing the problem.

Replying to a question Begum Zia said that everyone irrespective of his opinion ought to help maintain the environment conducive for investment which would benefit each and every citizen in Bangladesh.

Begum Zia said that she had some exploratory discussions with Prime Minister Mahathir on developing cooperation between the SAARC and the ASEAN.

She said that she would have discussions with the leaders of six other SAARC countries and the Malaysian premier said that he would also have discussions with the other ASEAN leaders on the issue of development of institutional cooperation between the two regional forums.

She said that Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman also had discussions with his counterpart on the matter.

Replying to a question Begum Zia said that Malaysian investor in Bangladesh could be expected to come soon.

An earlier BSS report from Langkawi said, the Prime Minister was given a hearty send-off when she left for home at the end of her four-day official visit to Malaysia.

State dignitaries and minister in attendance and Deputy Minister of Transport Datin Paduka Hajjah Zaleha Ismail bade farewell to her at the Langkawi International Airport. Malaya girls of Langkawi islands accorded Begum Zia a farewell in a traditional Malaysian way.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to Malaysia Mahboob Alam and other officials of the high commission were also at the airport to see the Prime Minister off.

Khaleda appraised

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plained to Ninian the constitutional aspects of the caretaker government issue, and other impediments to implementing the Opposition demand.

The Prime Minister may hold a similar meeting with her cabinet colleagues today.

Begum Zia, who is chairperson of the BNP may nominate some other leaders for the negotiation team.

The time and venue of a meeting between the Prime Minister and Sir Ninian were yet to be fixed.

PM optimistic

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she told newsmen on her return home after a four-day official visit to Malaysia.

"I was out of the country and cannot say anything more about the matter. I just read your reports in the newspapers on board the aircraft and have an idea about issue," a smiling Begum Zia said in reply to a question.

She said the Commonwealth dignitaries are now in Dhaka to facilitate talks and you will know everything when the dialogue takes place.

Osmany Hospital's interne docs begin indefinite strike

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Oct 14: Interne doctors of the Sylhet MAG Osmany Medical College Hospital today began an indefinite strike while the hospital doctors stopped private practices as well as attending private clinics here. Admission of new patients in private clinics have also been suspended.

The decisions were taken yesterday afternoon demanding punitive action against those responsible for the ransacking of chambers and attack on two doctors.

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Business leaders

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industrialists.

Latifur Rahman said Malaysian investors had showed keen interest in investing in the development of infrastructures in Bangladesh, particularly in road and highways construction.

He also said the inclusion of the potential economic partners in the Prime Minister's entourage had demonstrated her sincerity and encouragement for the promotion of trade and investment in Bangladesh.

A number of businessmen and entrepreneurs expressing their experiences about Prime Minister's visit said the trip had created a better image of Bangladesh and brightened investment possibilities in the country.

Businessman Salauddin Kasem Khan, a member of the delegation said there was a possibility of about one billion US dollar Malaysian investment in Bangladesh in the next five years in different areas including the textile, PVC, furniture, telecommunications and power transmission.

Materialisation of Japanese-Malaysian investment, Khan said, would need follow up both at the government and private levels.

Both the Malaysian and Bangladesh business leaders attended a seminar on "investment and trade opportunities in Bangladesh" on October 12 in which Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was the chief guest.

Abdur Rab Chowdhury, president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry and a member of the delegation, said it would need streamlining of the government policies and the removal of the impediments on way to the implementation to ensure more foreign investment.

He said there was a brighter prospect of increasing the exports of Bangladeshi goods including ceramics, shoes, leather goods and pharmaceuticals to Malaysia to reduce the existing trade gap between the two countries.

The Midnight File

Iraqi soldiers stop retreat

BAGHDAD, Oct 14: Tensions between the United States and Iraq rose again Friday when Iraqi soldiers withdrawing from the Kuwait border stopped their retreat. US Defence Secretary William Perry said at least 10,000 of Iraq's elite Republican Guards appear to be digging in at Nasiriyah. The Iraqi city is less than 170 kilometers (100 miles) north of the Kuwaiti border, and about the same distance south of the 32nd parallel — the southernmost point to which Washington wants Iraqi troops to withdraw, reports AP.

French minister resigns

PARIS, Oct 14: French Industry Minister Gerard Longuet resigned today amid allegations of corruption involving the financing of his holiday home and an illegal property deal involving his party's headquarters. Longuet, a key figure in the government of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, announced his resignation after a meeting with the French premier at his Matignon residence, reports AFP.

Nobel Peace Prize

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as worthy of the prize." The dispute was the committee's worst since 1973, when two members submitted their resignations after the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, then Vietnamese leader. But they did not formally resign, nor did they announce their plans, until after the traditional award ceremony in December.

Many Jewish groups regard Arafat as a terrorist, despite the historic peace accord he signed in a White House ceremony. Many previous awardees have gone to controversial figures. Last year's prize was awarded to African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela and South African President FW de Klerk last year. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev won in 1990.

Alfred Nobel, a Swede who made a fortune by inventing dynamite, endowed the Nobel Prizes in his 1895 will.

The peace prize will be awarded in Oslo on December 10. The other Nobel prizes, all announced this past week in Stockholm, will be handed out in the Swedish capital on the same day.

Rabin, reacting to the prize in a statement issued by his spokesman, said the "work is not yet finished, and the prize is for the future more than it is a reward for the efforts of peace that have been made up until now."

He added that the peace process faced a "moment of truth" over the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier.

Arafat said he was honored but that the award belonged to the Palestinian people. "The prize is not for me," he said from Alexandria, Egypt. "It is for my people who suffered a lot, people who have been able to achieve the peace of the brave, for our martyrs, for our prisoners, for our children, for the future."

The prize carries an award of 7-million-kronor (933,000 dollars) in a news conference that he submitted his resignation today because he believed Arafat's background in terrorism made him unworthy.

"During the debates on the award of this year's Nobel Peace Prize, the committee ended up with a split decision," Kristiansen said. "Out of respect for the prize and for my own deep-rooted conviction could not accept (Arafat)

from its custody. "We have already identified 18 LTE suspects we can release straight away to the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross). We expect the LTE to reciprocate and free 18 of our men," a military official said.

He corrected earlier reports that the first offer of freeing prisoners had come from the LTE.

The Tigers are known to be holding 19 policemen, 20 soldiers and seven sailors captured during attacks against military targets in the past four years.

Earlier last month, the LTE handed over 10 policemen to the government to mark Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga's partial lifting of an economic embargo on Jaffna leading to the latest round of peace talks.

The prisoner release came despite sporadic clashes between the LTE and security forces elsewhere leaving at least 19 people dead. The government has said it was under-terred by stepped up LTE attacks in the run-up to talks.

US, Russia

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Iraq's announcement was aimed at lifting the UN sanctions imposed after its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait. In the joint statement, Russia pledged to work for an end to the sanctions.

But both the United States and Britain turned down the initiative today.

"The United States does not accept the proposal for sanctions relief contained in yesterday's Iraqi-Russian statement," US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said during a stopover in Germany after a Middle East tour.

Christopher said Iraq should recognise Kuwait and its border immediately and unconditionally, and comply with all UN resolutions stemming from the Gulf War.

British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd also said the Iraqi offer to recognise Kuwait was "inadequate."

JS Sect

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source said "it has not been decided yet."

A major objective of the project is to provide the Jatiya Sangsad with the instrumental facilities to more effectively conduct its legislative business.

The project would also help enhance members' skill in parliamentary practice and legislative work, improve technical competence of the secretariat staff, expand the collections and services of parliament library and modernise information management.

If the project is implemented, Parliament members will get the services of a liaison office to maintain contact with different government agencies and also with individuals and groups in their constituencies.

Saifur tells press on return

IMF to supervise economies of both rich and poor states

International Monetary Fund (IMF) has agreed to exercise more surveillance on the economies of developed countries, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said yesterday, reports UNB.

The Fund will exercise intensive surveillance on developed countries in order to harmonise the global economy in the coming years," he said, returning from Madrid where World Bank and IMF celebrated their 50th founding anniversary and held joint annual meeting.

Saifur Rahman, the immediate past-chairman of the Governing Board of the Bank and the Fund, presided over and presented the opening and closing statements in the annual meeting attended by the Spanish King and Queen, besides governors and delegates from the member countries.

Talking to newsmen at the Zia International Airport,

Rahman said the rich countries should be cautious in implementing their monetary policies as those create impacts on the poor nations in today's interdependent world.

The governors had discussed the matter in the annual meeting and it was decided that the Fund would supervise the macro-economies not only of the poor nations but also of the rich countries," he said.

The minister pointed out that the governors from the Third World countries stressed in the meeting that future programmes of the World Bank in any country should conform to its social, cultural and economic situations as well as its development process.

Rahman also pointed out that the poorest countries had stressed on more World Bank resources, particularly from its soft loan window IDA, for their physical development as they failed to net the private capital

inflow.

Replying to a query, Rahman said the governors had discussed the formation of World Trade Organisation (WTO), the proposed body expected to replace GATT (General Agreement on Tariff and Trade) next year.

The Finance Minister saw a "very good image" of Bangladesh among the world community, for achieving a sound macro-economic stability despite its many problems like huge population.

Rahman, however, was critical about the activities of a section of NGOs (Non-governmental organisations) in and outside the country as they clamour raising different issues like proper resettlement during implementation of development projects.

Citing examples, he said the cost for resettlement of the affected people in the Jamuna Bridge project rose to 64 million US dollar from only 16 million.

Talks useful, says Ninian

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statement at the meeting that began at 11 in the morning.

Clarifying the objective of his present mission, Ninian is learnt to have told the opposition leaders, "a believer in democratic system, I would love to facilitate a fruitful dialogue between the country's opposition parties and the government side so that you could repair your democracy. He is also learnt to have requested them to cooperate with him to achieve the objective, especially by giving him a clear Opposition interpretation of the country's present political crisis."

According to sources concerned Tofael Ahmed of the Awami League (AL), Moudud Ahmed of the Jatiya Party (JP), Matur Rahman Nizami of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Suranjit Sengupta of Ganotantri Party (GP) and Salauddin Kader Chowdhury of National Democratic Party (NDP) explained the reasons behind the opposition boycott of parliament proceedings in demand for constitutional provisions under a caretaker government.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Abdus Samad Azad and Mohammad Nasim are learnt to have given some clarifica-

tions in response to Ninian's queries at the meeting.

Termining the caretaker administration issue the main cause of contention, the opposition leaders reportedly told Ninian that once the principal issue was resolved at the proposed talks, there would be no problem to reach an agreement on issues like strengthening of the Election Commission (EC) or formulating a code of conduct for the political leaders and activists.

Making a comparison between the election held under a caretaker government in 1991 and those under the present administration, the opposition leaders told Ninian that the first one fair while the others were rigged by the ruling party, one leader said. Since there is a partisan government in power with full control over the state's executive wing, the EC could not exercise whatever authority it now has during the elections," Ninian was told.

Replying to a question from Ninian, the opposition leaders said that the holding of national polls in 1991 under caretaker administration had later been ratified by the present Parliament on the basis of a consensus reached between the treasury and the opposition benches.

"Termining it a political necessity," the opposition leaders also told him that the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), although it enjoys majority in Parliament, should come forward to endorse the concept of a caretaker government and insert it into the constitution. Arguing that the nation had been left with no option but to go for constitutional provisions for general elections under a caretaker administration for institutionalising democracy, the opposition leaders informed Ninian that they had no objection to having the provision for several terms, source said. "Ninian took note of the point."

Sir Ninian was aided by Dr Moses Anafu and Christopher Childs, who came to Dhaka as an advance team.

Ninian is learnt to have collected a copy of the country's Constitution and another copy of the Rules of Procedure of the Jatiya Sangsad to examine the opposing sides' position from constitutional and procedural points of views.

Meanwhile, an opposition leader who attended yesterday's meeting told The Daily Star that they have succeeded in making their points clear to the Commonwealth emissary.

Other opposition leaders who attended yesterday's meeting included Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, Anwar Hossain Manju and Manirul Haq Chowdhury of Jatiya Party, Maulana Abdus Sobhan and Sheikh Anwar Ali of Jamaat and Maulana Obaidul Haq of the IQJ.



The image of goddess Durga being immersed in the river Buriganga yesterday marking the end of Durga Puja. — Star photo