

DOWN TO EARTH

Sullied Image of City Life

Among the many problems besetting the Dhaka city life, the growing beggar problem and the mounting traffic jams seem to stand out as highly unsightly phenomena. To a foreigner coming to Dhaka, his bitter experience with beggars begins from the moment he emerges from the airport. After his initial encounter with them at the airport, his trial with them continues until he reaches his hotel. Enroute there are some traffic signal points and at every such point, the ever-present sight is a group of maimed, disabled and diseased people persistent with their begging pleas. To the foreigners, the ubiquitous presence of beggars provides a horrendous experience.

At present the situation in this respect has deteriorated to such an extent that it sometimes seems that the whole city is besieged by beggars of all descriptions. Not to speak of foreign visitors, even the local people are badgered with-out measure by them on the streets and every conceivable public place. This conveys a poor image of the city to outsiders and acts as a disincentive to the tourist trade.

There are other unseemly sights which meet the eyes of foreign visitors. The environment around the posh Sonargaon Hotel does not seem to be proper. Nearby there is a wholesale fish market. The malodorous air arising from that market spreads far and wide. There is a growing slum nearby. Across the busy main road, opposite road junction embellished by an artistic metallic structure, a park is supposed to come up. But currently it is being used as a shelter for beggars and squatters and also as a goat grazing ground with shanties outside its periphery. It, therefore, seems that there is little realisation of the imperative need

By A S M Nurunnabi

for creating and maintaining proper environmental atmosphere in the areas frequented by foreign visitors so that a better image of the city is presented to them.

For a poor country beggary is an inevitable issue, linked with wider socio-economic implications. When the problem reaches a stage when the daily life of a metropolis is harassed to an unbearable degree, it calls for adoption of appropriate measures to control it. Such a stage has been reached in this city.

It is understood that no survey of beggar population of the city was ever made. In fact, it does not seem possible to arrive at any estimate in this connection at present because of the daily proliferation of their number. The Department of Social Welfare has six vagrant homes in the country. They are located at Mirpur (Dhaka), Godnyle (Narayanganj), Betila (Manikganj), Dhala (Mymensingh), Kashimpur and Pubail (Gazipur). Their total capacity is understood to be about 1000, which obviously is too small, considering the magnitude of the beggar problem.

Sometimes law and order agencies round up some beggars from certain areas of the city and send them to the vagrant homes. But because of the limited capacity of these homes, their administering authorities cannot accommodate them all. So most of them are allowed to go away and the concerned authorities take the plea that they have fled. The anti-vagrancy laws do not prove effective even when they are produced before courts. All these steps do not seem to produce any deterring effect on the steady growth of their number in the city. The problem is compounded by the existence of organised groups of beggars in the city. If the authorities could take steps to

deal with their rings, that may help in considerably reducing the presence of professional beggars in the city.

The present state of traffic chaos in the city is another eyesore for all. One of main causative factors for the stupendous traffic clog is the unbridled proliferation of rickshaws. Another important factor contributing to the traffic anarchy is the squatter hawkers. Their ubiquitous and burgeoning growth is a cause of concern for traffic controllers.

Lately the Dhaka City Corporation has formed a task force to identify the problems facing the city dwellers. Though among the major problems of the city people as listed by the Corporation, the beggar problem has not been included, it is generally felt that there is no less urgency in tackling this problem, for their omnipresence in city life projects a poor image of our country as bereft of self-respect and orderly civic life. For removing traffic jams, the DCC has reportedly taken steps to reduce the number of rickshaws by withdrawing those with fake or invalid licences. To improve the pace of traffic movement, the Corporation has also suggested reintroduction of metres in the autorickshaws which would help in reducing their fare thereby encouraging more people to avail of that conveyance. Moreover, construction of 13 flyovers is reportedly planned by the DCC to help ensure a smooth traffic system.

Let us hope that solution of other city problems identified by the City Corporation such as repair and expansion of roads, improvement of power supply, keeping the city clean, eradication of mosquitoes and evicting hawkers from the pavements of city streets would result in projecting a better image of the city life.

Caretaker govt against concept of democracy, says Rafiq

RANGPUR, Nov 4: Housing and Public Works Minister Rafiqul Islam Mia said a caretaker government could not be alternative one under an elected democratic government and it is against the concept of democracy, reports BSS.

He further said that democratic government could be changed through the mandate of the people not by the dialogue.

The minister was speaking as the chief guest at the Chhatradal conference of the greater Rangpur-Dinajpur district held at the Rangpur Public Library maidan yesterday.

Rafiq said "We want to end the political crisis through meaningful dialogue but dialogue should be aimed at ensuring the right of voting. For this purpose, the election commission should be strengthened and identity cards should be given to the voters".



The National Garments Workers' Federation brought out a procession in the city yesterday in support of their 10-point charter of demands. — Stat photo

The Midnight File

UNITA threatens all-out war

LUANDA, Nov 4: Angolan rebels threatened Friday to return to all-out war if government troops do not halt an advance that has pushed to the edge of the rebels' headquarters. "If the government does not call back its troops immediately the peace process stops right here," said Rui Oliveira, spokesman in Portugal for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, or UNITA. The fighting as well as the rebel protests have endangered a UN-brokered treaty to end Angola's 19-year civil war. Africa's longest, reports AP.

Floods kill 17 Jordanians

AMMAN, Nov 4: Floods swept away homes in eastern and southern Jordan, killing 17 people and injuring 34, a news agency said. Eleven people were missing in the heavy rains, which are rare in this desert country, the official news agency Petra reported, reports AP.

Farooq Abdullah's 'fourth option'

JAMMU, India, Nov 4: Former Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah proposed a 'fourth option' today to resolve the 47-year-old dispute between India and Pakistan over the Himalayan territory.

Autonomy for the Indian-controlled southern two-thirds of Kashmir and similar constitutional guarantees for the Pakistan-controlled northern third would resolve the dispute, Abdullah said.

The line of control dividing the two zones could be converted into an international border with Kashmiris on both sides enjoying easy travel, communication and trade links, Abdullah said in an interview with AFP.

He called his proposal a "fourth option" which would leave neither India nor Pakistan with a feeling of triumph or defeat.

Suggestions for a Kashmir solution have so far included three options: Letting people

of the Muslim-majority Himalayan territory decide whether they wanted to join India or Pakistan or opt for independence.

Abdullah, 55, a doctor of medicine who heads the pro-India National Conference party, suggested that Pakistan be allowed to retain the part of Kashmir under its control.

New Delhi should convert the province of Jammu and Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in overwhelmingly Hindu India, into an autonomous unit, he said.

Abdullah, who quit as Kashmir Chief Minister in 1990 at the height of a Muslim secessionist rebellion, said his proposed solution would lead to friendly relations between India and ensure peace in the subcontinent.

Reactions to Huda's interview

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ment for the past seven months.

Barrister Huda, in an interview published in the Bengali daily Inqilab yesterday, suggested that after the expiry of term of the current Fifth Parliament, the Chief Justice should become the head of an interim government with four Appellate Division judges as his cabinet ministers.

Mohammad Nasim said if the government accepts this concept of a caretaker government, the parties can discuss to work out the modalities of such a government.

"But I would like to slightly contradict the information minister's proposal. I would not like to involve the judiciary with administrative affairs of the state," Nasim said.

"In that case we can, through dialogue, find out a neutral person acceptable to all the parties to head the caretaker government," he said.

He said he hoped the government would soon announce whether they accept the concept of a caretaker government, so that the Commonwealth-mediated dialogue can resume to resolve the whole matter immediately.

"Such an announcement will also help avoid a possible confrontation between the government and Opposition," the AL leader added.

Another ruling party leader holding a cabinet post told The Daily Star last night: "What Huda has done is a complete violation of party discipline."

He also pointed to the concept of collective responsibility

in a parliamentary form of government and said when a no-confidence motion was taken against Abdus Salam Talukdar in Parliament, it was considered by the Speaker a motion against the government.

"If the government disowns the proposal what will be his position?" he questioned.

He said that a man under such collective obligation can only take personal decisions in his family affairs.

No official reaction was available from the ruling party yesterday while party Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukdar could not be reached by telephone for comment. Yesterday was Talukdar's 57th birthday.

Meanwhile, quite naturally Huda's interview in the Inqilab became the topic of discussion in the country's political circles.

The interview was originally given exclusively to the mass-circulated Bengali Daily Ittefaq on Wednesday before being withdrawn at the last minute. It was collected and printed by the Inqilab yesterday.

In it Huda proffered a dramatic proposal — that on expiry of the five-year tenure of the current Parliament an interim government be formed with the Chief Justice as prime minister and four judges of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court as ministers.

The interim cabinet would appoint a new Election Commission within seven days to conduct election activities.

The tenure of the interim cabinet would be 90 days but the next general elections must be completed within 40

to 45 days after dissolution of the present Parliament.

On the first day of the new Parliament, the tenure of the interim government headed by the Chief Justice would expire and the Appellate Division will go to its original business.

It would be considered as an additional responsibility of the Appellate Division.

The Information Minister, however, repeatedly took care to mention that the idea was his personal opinion and that his party was not bound to bear the responsibility of this suggestion.

In reply to a question put by this correspondent as to how his proposal could be implemented, Huda said all the parties represented in Parliament should join its sessions and make necessary amendments to the Constitution.

In reply to another question whether his proposal was acceptable to his own party, Huda said, "No, the party does not want any amendment to the Constitution right now."

He said there is no last word in politics.

"The BNP all along has done everything for the welfare of the people. And if the BNP wants to save the country from chaos and anarchy my party should seriously consider this proposal," he said.

Meanwhile, speculation has been rife in political circles since Thursday following newspaper reports about his unpublished interview with the Ittefaq that Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia may pull Huda up and either dismiss him from her cabinet or ask him to resign.

Cabinet body

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the Surma Basin — rich in natural resources — includes building a 200 megawatt power plant by utilising the natural gas of the Jalalabad gas field.

Petrobangla sources informed The Daily Star that according to Occidental's PSCs, the Bangladesh government would get 77.5 per cent of the share in case of the discovery of any commercially viable oil and gas fields.

As per the PSCs Petrobangla, on behalf of the Bangladesh government, holds the first right to refusal in case of purchasing gas or oil from the exploration company during commercial production period. In other words, Occidental would be unable to sell oil or gas to any third party unless the government refused to purchase those.

Cairn plc and the Holland Sea Search have submitted a joint PSC for exploration in Petrobangla's Block 15 covering the Chittagong region and the Semutang gas field in the Hill Tracts.

The government on May 5 last signed an agreement with these two companies for exploration in the Bay of Bengal and these companies are expected to begin seismic survey in the Bay off the coast of Cox's Bazar and Sandwip from early December.

The PSC for Block 15 is similar to the one approved for exploration in the Bay, sources said, adding that it has been duly approved by the Energy Ministry, the NBR, Finance Ministry and the Law Ministry.

Norwegian plane hijacker surrenders

GARDERMOEN (Norway), Nov 4: A Bosnian man surrendered to police late on Thursday eight hours after hijacking a domestic Norwegian flight in a bid to seek more international aid for his ravaged country, reports Reuter.

Police grabbed the unidentified 25-year-old from the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, which has been under siege by rebel Serbs for 30 months, as he left the plane at Oslo's Gardermoen airport on Thursday evening.

He had told police by radio he wanted to give himself up because he did not want the hostages, 76 passengers and a crew of four, to suffer. Police said nobody was hurt during the eight hour drama.

Bail for Abiola

LAGOS, Nov 4: A federal court of appeal in Nigeria today granted detained opposition leader Mashood Abiola bail and urged him to keep the peace, a court reporter said, reports Reuter.

It was not clear whether the government would free Abiola pending the outcome of its appeal against the ruling.

Pak ban on travel to India goes today

ISLAMABAD, Nov 4: Pakistani authorities said today they would lift a month-old ban on travel to India from Saturday after a World Health Organisation report that a deadly plague there had receded, reports Reuter.

Early last month Pakistan banned all travel by land, air and sea after the outbreak of the pneumonic plague there.

Hague

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paid little attention to Bangladesh, he admitted.

"We can now shift to a country like Bangladesh, encouraging our business sector to invest here," the senior Dutch official said.

He said, the 160 million dollar trade volume is highly in favour of Bangladesh.

During his stay Engering signed a treaty with his Bangladesh counterpart for the protection of investment.

He hoped it would be ratified and implemented by the respective parliaments by the beginning of next year and, following that, the volume of trade would double.

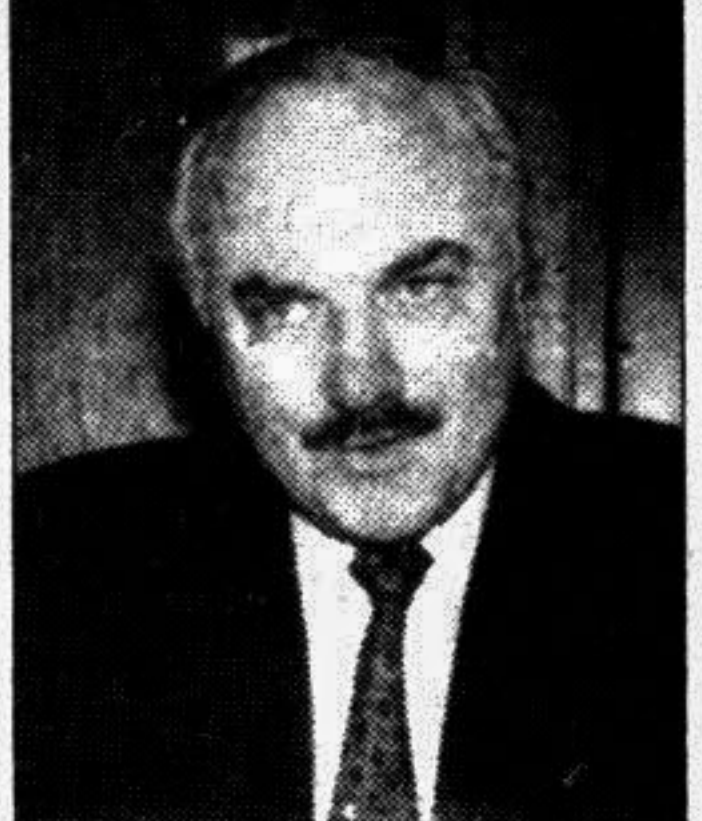
Under the treaty, a Dutch company would be treated here as a local company and would be able to transfer its profits to the mother company.

"This is a major confidence building step," he added.

He termed his visit as a "fact-finding mission" and hoped that Dutch trade delegations might visit Bangladesh shortly to explore the areas of investment and cooperation.

A multi-national like Unilever has been operating in Bangladesh but with a low profile while a Dutch firm won a multi-million dollar river training contract for the Jamuna multi-purpose bridge.

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BGMEA defers

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come tax deduction to 0.25 per cent from the current 0.50 per cent.

He also agreed that the garment units enjoying tax holiday will get exemption from advance tax deduction on the basis of BGMEA certificate instead of NBR's certificate.

Those units have been exempted from deduction of advance income tax from July 1 this year.

The government has also lifted the embargo on import of grey fabric, including natural grey, under bonded warehouse facilities by the garment units.

The BGMEA, however, warned that it would go for action programme if its demands are not fulfilled by two months.

ILO report on women's employment

also be given to protecting the reproductive function of both men and women.

The report entitled 'Female employment: The window of opportunity for poverty alleviation in Bangladesh,' prepared by the ILO East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team, was released earlier this year.

The report advocated a more gender-sensitive integrated approach for employment generation and poverty alleviation programmes to address the interrelated problems of poverty and underemployment and at the same time to promote the social integration and empowerment of women in Bangladesh.

"The life patterns of most Bangladeshi women are shaped by male-dominated institutions governing the family, society and economy," it said. "But in a context of increasingly ineffective traditional family support systems, female earning capacities have become critical to the economic survival of households."

All available poverty indicators confirm that while poverty is endemic, women bear the brunt, the ILO report added. "Female-headed and managed households constitute some 15 per cent of all households and earn only 55 per cent of the national average household income. Some 96 per cent of female-headed households fall below the poverty line (under 2,122 calories per day per person), while 33 per cent are among the 'hard core' poor."

The report pointed out that poverty has forced more and more women into the labour force and female labour force participation has increased from four per cent in 1974 (as compared to 80 per cent for males) to 10.6 per cent in 1989 (85.3 per cent for males), but it is still one of the lowest in the world.

However, the report noted that an expanded definition of economic activities, taking into account work done by Bangladeshi women in a farm household, in the 1989 labour force survey led to a significant jump in female labour force participation rate to 63 per cent.

"Wage employment is particularly significant because of the deteriorating access of a growing number of households to productive assets," it said and, quoting from a report, stated that about 70 per cent of married women in male-headed landless households and 90 per cent of female heads are currently engaged in wage work.

Over 70 per cent of the female labour force is employed in agriculture while about two million women are reported to be self-employed in either individual or group enterprises in rural areas or the urban informal sector, the report added.

Less than five per cent of the female labour force are classified as employees and a minuscule 0.06 per cent are employers while the bulk are unpaid family helpers — 83 per cent as compared to less than one-fifth of male workers.

"Changes in sectoral composition of women's employment have not led to occupational diversification; women are still confined to the least technical and unskilled occupations, in jobs that are unstable and insecure," the report said.

Wage rates for unskilled women workers are less than half that of male workers in non-agriculture, and about 88 per cent in agriculture.

According to the 1989 labour force survey, 83 per cent of the female labour force were involuntarily working less than 40 hours per week as compared to 15 per cent of male workers.

"Physical conditions and safety measures in industrial units in both rural and urban areas are notoriously poor," the survey observed.

Recommendations

According to a study, quoted in the report, the quotas set aside for improving employment in government jobs are not reached either in the civil service or in the state-owned enterprises, the main reason being that there are inadequate numbers of qualified women. Female employment as a percentage of the total employment in the

civil service stood at only 7.9 per cent as of 1991.

Literacy levels among Bangladeshi women are among the lowest in the world although the female literacy rate improved from 8.6 per cent in 1961 to 19.2 per cent in 1991, the report noted. Women continue to lag far behind men in vocational and technical education and training, accounting for only about five per cent of total enrollment in 1991.

The report also feared that the economic reform measures initiated in recent years would also affect women's employment and poverty alleviation.

The 'growth strategies do not have in-built provisions to ensure that they will benefit poor women. In fact, the fear is that women would bear a heavier brunt of the accelerated reforms, at least in the short to medium term."

Recognising women's employment as the window of opportunity for poverty alleviation, the ILO report suggested that macro and sectoral planning must be clearly gender-differentiated, gender-specific employment and poverty considerations should be incorporated, impact of economic reform efforts on women must be monitored and priority should be ensured to education and health sectors which are key to the development of female human resources.

It also recommended an ILO technical assistance cooperation project to initiate an exercise to ensure the inclusion of the above objectives in project formulation, evaluation and monitoring.

"Fundamental to the adoption and implementation of gender-sensitive approach to women's employment and poverty alleviation is the mind-set and technical knowledge of policy makers, planners and implementers at all levels, as well as the socio-cultural attitudes and awareness of the intended women beneficiaries and all their families and local communities," the report said.

It recommended sensitizing or awareness raising programmes focusing on gender-sensitive employment and poverty related issues and suggested ILO technical cooperation in this area.

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