

DOWN TO EARTH

Dhaka under new Mayorship

By A S M Nurunnabi

The new Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has, on different occasions, spelled out certain programmes that he planned to implement. Being the first directly elected, the new Mayor is in a better position to transform the DCC into a properly organised service organisation.

The task is not easy. The capital city is beset with problems concerning basic amenities like water, sanitation, electricity and transportation. According to some quarters, the most serious problem of Dhaka City Corporation is not the shortage of funds, but the improper use or wastage of the funds. In a poor country like ours, the City Corporations are not expected to get an abundant supply of fund. So the guiding principle should be to cut the coat according to the cloth with strict enforcement of quality as the guiding principle in the construction or execution of plans to make the best use of available funds.

The new Mayor has been in office for about a year. What total picture do we find in this period of time? Do we find signs of improvement? In the opinion of observers, there is increasing sign that the city's problems are growing out of hand. Residents find garbage all around, law and order situation has deteriorated beyond acceptable limit, water, sewerage, electricity, drainage and all other related services not dependable.

The most visible urban problem that is adding to our troubles is traffic. City traffic has become impossible, to put it in one word. There is the unbridled growth of rickshaws which we talk about but do nothing to address. Another problem which is adding to our traffic congestion is the unplanned and often unauthorised bus stands and bus terminals which have been set up at various busy points of the important streets of the city. The crowding of the city by the floating population has added a new dimension to the problem.

The city areas have expanded over the years but with it the streets and sewerage system have not improved to that extent. According to a report, a survey carried out by an independent research organisation shows that the sanitation coverage of the city is only 70 per cent.

The Mayor's commitment to the residents of the city is restoration of a clean environment. He promised to intensify an anti-mosquito drive but so far no sign of progress in this regard is in evidence. The Volunteer Brigade which he promised to form in different wards in the metropolis have not come into being. A recent newspaper report said that the breeding grounds of mosquitoes would be eliminated through a new technique adopted in Calcutta. Under the current second phase of a three-phase programme, the DCC has planned, under the new technique, to unleash a kind of fish known as 'guppy' to eat the mosquito larvae. The result of the experiment is yet to be felt. Some are, however, pessimistic that immediate relief from the mosquito menace is far from possible and that the residents will have to resign themselves till the misery it causes comes to a natural end. The hope for a natural end to the menace arises because mosquitoes are said to have a short life-span — about 30 days in all — 15 days in larval stage and 15 days at adult stage. November to February is their breeding season. The month of February is going to be over and therefore there may be a natural end to the

PM must accept demand for caretaker govt first, says Amu

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League presidium member Amir Hossain Amu said yesterday they could accept the offer of the Prime Minister to hold talks with the Leader of the Opposition if the ruling party agreed in principle with the opposition parties on their demand for a caretaker administration.

A dialogue between the Prime Minister and opposition leader Sheikh Hasina can be held if the government, in principle, accepts the demand for a caretaker administration," Amu told The Daily Star last night.

He also said, "If the ruling party agrees and those of the Prime Minister formally sends the proposal in writing to Sheikh Hasina, then we can consider the proposal."

Prime Minister and Leader of the House Begum Khaleda Zia, in her winding up speech in Parliament Thursday, said she was ready to hold direct talks with the Leader of the Opposition to resolve the political disputes.

The AL presidium member, however, said "Under the present circumstances, there is no scope for talks unless their demand is fulfilled."

Another AL leader declined to comment on the fresh offer from the PM saying that she (Begum Zia) had made similar offers twice in the past but no further progress was made in this regard.

The AL leader said that they showed little interest in the PM's proposal and the matter was not even discussed at the emergency meeting of the AL working committee yesterday.

Jatiya Party leader Moudud Ahmed said the Prime Minister's call to sit for talks was "absolutely meaningless" in the present context.

Jamaat-e-Islami leaders were not available for their comments on this issue.

Rashed Khan Menon of Workers' Party said the Prime Minister's call to hold talks is not enough to resolve the present political impasse. Effective measures should be taken to end the crisis, he added.

He also demanded dissolution of Parliament and holding of general election under a caretaker government.

AL programmes to observe birthday of Bangabandhu

By Staff Correspondent

The 75th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will be observed throughout the country on March 17.

A meeting of the Awami League sub-committee on education and cultural affairs yesterday discussed different programmes to observe the day.

The meeting, held with Principal Kamruzzaman in the chair drew up a two-day programme from March 17 at Tungipara in Gopalganj district, the birthplace of Bangabandhu.

The sub-committee will also hold a meeting with poets, litterateurs, journalists, artists and intellectuals on March 8 in the city on this occasion.



The Jumatul Wida congregation offering munajat at the Baitul Mukarram mosque in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Confusion over ruling

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Thus the Speaker kept those three letters aside saying that those should not be deemed as received by him.

The Speaker then dealt with the rest 144 resignation letters including those of Husain Mohammad Ershad, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury and Dabirul Islam, all of which had been rejected.

The Parliament Secretariat, in a press release yesterday, clarified the ruling saying none of the resignation letters was accepted.

Razzak Ali told The Daily Star Thursday night "It is true that the letters of H M Ershad, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury and Dabirul Islam were receivable as per Article 67 (2) of the Constitution but I rejected those letters on separate ground."

Article 67 (2) of the Constitution said "A member of Parliament may resign his seat by writing under his hand addressed to the Speaker and the seat shall become vacant when the writing is received by the Speaker or if the office of the Speaker is vacant or the Speaker is for any reason unable to perform his functions by the Deputy Speaker."

The *en masse* resignations were designed to frustrate the democratic process and push the country into a constitutional crisis with unpredictable consequences, the Speaker said, adding "I am clearly of the opinion that these resignation letters which contained reasons opposed to the very concept of democracy and contrary to the fundamental principles of state policy are not contemplated by Article 67 (2) of the Constitution."

Razzak Ali said their might be slight confusion as the ruling was lengthy.

Major Gen. (Retd) Mahmudul Hassan in a letter dated December 28, 1994 addressed to the Speaker, said "He decided not to resign from the Parliament."

Thus those two letters of resignation said to be of Mr. Mustafizur Rahman MP and Mr. Akteruzzaman Chowdhury MP are not considered to have been received by me within the meaning of Article 67 (2) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh read with Rule 177 of the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament. So their seats do not stand vacant," the Speaker said in page-2 of his ruling.

Eid markets

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The prices of men's shoes and sneakers have also shot up by Tk 100 to 200 a pair.

Many buyers complained about poor salesmanship and said many salesmen behave rudely with customers.

Our Staff Correspondent Chittagong adds: Shopping climaxed in Chittagong city markets with the Eid festival only days away.

Customers in their thousands of all ages and sexes streamed into the markets.

But the new trend set by some prominent markets is a sale campaign through lottery tickets. Prizes like microbus, car, colour television, refrigerator and other costly items have been put on display at the respective shops to lure customers.

The markets including Bipani Bitan (New Market), Mimi Super Appolo Shopping Centre, Chittagong Shopping Complex, Highway Plaza, Lucky Plaza and Reazuddin Bazar appear to have been locked in a lottery-competition to attract more shoppers.

25 killed in bus mishap in Iraq

BAGHDAD, Feb 24: Twenty-five people were killed and 10 others injured when a bus crashed after one of its tires burst on a road in southern Iraq, state-run television said today, reports AFP.

New wages

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Earlier, a convention of the *Pui Suta, Bastra Kal Sangram Parishad* was held in the city with its convenor Abul Bashar in the chair.

The convention expressed its resentment over non-fulfillment of their demands for implementation of Wages Commission Award. It called for meeting their demands before Eid festival.

The convention discussed the next course of action and empowered the central leaders to chalk out future programmes.

It also demanded release of arrested workers and compensation for the injured and the dead.

One shot in city

By Staff Correspondent

One pedestrian received serious bullet injuries during a clash between two groups at Jurain in the city yesterday evening.

At least ten rounds of gunshots were fired during the fight between the rival groups in the Alam Market.

The victim Moinul Hossain was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital with serious bullet injuries in his leg, sources said.

The rival groups also chased each other creating panic among the people.

5 killed in city

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DMCH yesterday morning. He was admitted to the hospital in critical condition Thursday night. A speeding bus hit the pedestrian near the Farmgate, medical sources said.

All the dead bodies were taken to the DMCH for autopsy.

In another incident, a group of muggers stabbed one Shirin Akhter, 30, at about 11 pm in Gandaria Thursday.

ALCWC

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Committee, the party said.

The AL said, in fact, the Speaker and the government are working against the hopes and aspirations of the people and thereby prolonging the rule of BNP through time-killing tactics.

The Speaker has also undermined the dignity of his office because he is involved in implementing the blueprint of the ruling party, it added.

The meeting said the Opposition MPs had resigned from Parliament at one stage of their movement to give democracy an institutional shape and save the country from authoritarian rule of the BNP.

And after the resignation of opposition MPs Parliament has lost its legitimacy and has become a one-party House, the meeting observed and blamed the BNP for ignoring the norms and values of parliamentary democracy.

The ALCWC meeting was adjourned till 11 am today.

Meanwhile, Workers Party at a meeting of party politbureau, described the Speaker's ruling as tactics of poor standard and said it could not help regain credibility of Parliament.

The meeting, held with party president Amal Sen in the chair, demanded dissolution of present Parliament and declaration of general elections immediately.

The meeting resolved that mere a call to sit for talks with the Opposition can not resolve the crisis. The government should take initiatives to reach a consensus on the legal structure of the caretaker government, it suggested.

PM's call for direct talks terribly late, yet relevant

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for a solution." Even now, her invitation is conditional, saying, "If necessary." Does not my honourable Prime Minister know whether it is "necessary" or not? Hasn't enough happened already to make such a summit level talks absolutely necessary. What more needs to happen for her to categorically say "Let's talk."

Yes, the PM made, on few occasions, some vague and generalised overtures for talks with the opposition, but never before, to the best of my knowledge (and I would be happy to be proven wrong) did the PM suggest direct talks with the leader of the opposition.

The Prime Minister, as someone who has been empowered by the people to lead the nation, as someone who has been given the charge, as someone who is responsible for governing the country, and as someone, who is the supreme leader for the moment, she should be far more forthcoming than she has been. Her stoic aloofness, as if nothing has happened, reveals a dangerous, and highly disturbing, detachment from reality.

For the four years that she has been leading us, not for once, did she share her thoughts with us - the Nation - except of course telling us how terrible the opposition is, and that everything would have been rosy, only if they cooperated. There has not been a single major policy statement, either inside or outside the Parliament, spelling out before the nation, as to what she, as our leader, is planning for us. The electronic media, that her government so thoroughly and shamelessly controls (shamelessly because it contravenes even the most rudimentary tenets of democracy), has also not been used to inform the nation, as to what is happening or what she is thinking. Only once did she address the nation, and that also after 147 MPs have already resigned. She addresses public meetings to harangue the opposition, but never to inform the public.

Is it realistic for any political leader to expect any cooperation from the opposition, when the only thing he or she can say about them are, how terribly terribly bad and unpatriotic they are? Do Begum Zia's advisors ever tell her how boringly repetitive her public addresses are?

But then, this is the reality in which we live, and life must go on. Even though it comes terribly late, and after so much damage to the Constitution, to the Parliament, to the democratic process, I think the offer of direct talks between Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina is a positive step, and should not be missed. The people are much too despondent, and the spirit too low, for us to take another body-blow, which it will be, if the talks do not materialise. Some leaders of Awami League (see related story) have expressed the possibility of talks, but on some preconditions. We take the very fact that the 'quick to reject' opposition has not said an outright 'no' yet, as a positive sign.

However, as of this moment, the offer of talks sound very empty and hollow. Without the Prime Minister specifying the basis for talks, it appears like a convenient political ploy. We feel the basis for talks exists. They have evolved through the months of negotiations already held. It now remains for the PM to reiterate them: As we understand, the following basis have already been agreed upon:

a) PM to resign 30 days before the elections;

b) Administration during those 30 days is to be headed by the President, and is to consist of 10 members, five from each side;

c) The Election Commission is to be made totally independent, and the police and other law enforcement agencies are to be placed under its authority.

The opposition, on its part, for the greater interest of the country, must accept the conditions that they were prepared to accept on the night of 28th, December. We know the opposition's view that conditions till the 28th were valid so long as there were no resignations. But now the stakes are much higher. These are talks of anger, and a change of course is necessary. We, most seriously and earnestly suggest that the opposition reconsiders and takes on a more positive and constructive attitude. For the sake of the country, and the people, and for all the sufferings and deprivation our people have been subjected to, we plead with the opposition leaders not to add any more demands to what they were willing to agree to, on that eventful evening - that of 28th December 1994.

To the two leaders we say, by now you have bled the nation enough. The hemorrhage is killing us. You both must realise that however powerful you may think you are, you cannot move ahead without mutual cooperation. Regardless of your extreme mutual suspicion, you need each other to move ahead. You have tried going alone. To the extent that the goals were negative, you succeeded. But to do something positive you cannot achieve anything alone. The facts of the last four years prove this, more than anything else.

What you both are not realising that taking advantage of your mindless mutual animosity, your enemies are gaining ground. They are gradually, effectively and unceasingly shifting the ground from under your feet. They are becoming stronger at your cost. So please put aside your egos and think of the people, and about the future of your own parties, and of yourselves, and talk to each other.

At this stage of our tragic political drama, we do not think that any attempt to revive the 5th Parliament will succeed. Even if we accept the Speaker's ruling, for argument's sake, all the Opposition needs to do, is to resign again - this time in accordance with the letter of the law. So let us not, therefore, waste our energy on something that everybody has contributed in destroying. We feel that total energy should now be concentrated on how to hold the next election in the best manner possible. The talks between the two leaders should

now focus on that and be geared towards building on whatever has already been achieved.

There remains much to be settled. The most important is the election dates. We feel, that there are very serious objective conditions that needs to be met in selecting the new dates. First, how soon can voters' list be completed. We want a computerised electoral roll. If that is not possible, then there must, at least, be an accurate and authentic one. This will require a minimum time. Let the two leaders agree on that. Then there are other preparations which can be judged on nonpartisan and professional grounds.

There should also be understanding on code of conduct for political parties, during campaigning, during the election, during counting, going up to the final announcement of results. There should also be talks about transparency of election funding.

All these are very tricky issues. Given the atmosphere of total distrust that now clouds the relations between the two camps, especially between the two leaders, and to which there could be plenty of incidents on either side to further complicate matters, the talks will not be easy. That is the challenge that lies before the two leaders. Please be warned that there are elements within your own camps who do not necessarily think as you do. They have their own separate agenda. Therefore, at some point, you both will have to learn to trust one another if for nothing else, then at least for self preservation.

The Midnight File

10 killed in Afghan village bombing

ISLAMABAD, Feb 24: Russian jets bombed a village in the northern Afghan province of Badakhshan today, killing 10 people and wounding 24, the official Kabul radio said. The bombing on the Maymay village in Badakhshan's Darwaz district also destroyed or damaged dozens of buildings, including a high school, said the broadcast monitored in Islamabad, reports Reuter.

Gunmen kill six in Karachi

KARACHI, Pakistan, Feb 24: Gunmen killed at least six people, including two devotees in a mosque, today in Pakistan's industrial port city of Karachi, police said. The two devotees were shot in a small mosque in central Karachi. Three were shot dead in north Karachi and one was killed by gunfire at Nusrat Bhutto Colony, police and private ambulance volunteers said, reports Reuter.

Foreign investment

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When his attention was drawn to a more restrictive Indian market, where the lock-in period is for five years, Shiner said India is a huge market and there are many ways to ease the effects of the lock-in restriction.

He said the Indian market keeps the scope for making huge investments in a large number of scrips enabling the foreign investors to liquidate the shares in phases. But in Bangladesh, this is not possible due to its small size with few scrips, he added.

Shiner said the Bangladesh bourse is smaller than those of Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The low liquidity of the market is not also suitable for making huge investments or going for long term investments on a single issue, he said, adding this is not the proper time for Bangladesh to impose such restriction on foreign investments.

The Switzerland-based brokerage firm, which is operating in the sub continent from Hong Kong, has so far injected 150 million US dollars into the Bangladesh stock market.

When asked to suggest measures to protect the market from events like "Mexico stock market crash," he said Bangladesh is a small market with a very low liquidity. It is not possible for the foreign investors with huge investments to withdraw from the market overnight due to lack of local eligible buyers, he added.

He said such restrictions could have been imposed because of the government's preferential treatment towards local traders but in that case, the authorities would have to be confident of the fact that the market would emerge without involving the foreign traders.

Jenny Danell of the Hong Kong-based firms WI Carr, said the restrictions imposed by the Bangladesh authorities are good for the local investors. Foreign investors interested in the market would have to think of making long-term investments in view of imposition of the restriction, she said.

This would discourage foreign investors to some extent, but if the market could emerge with the strength of the local traders, it would attract foreign investments in the long run, she said. "My impression about the market has not changed after the imposition of the restrictions," she added.

She, however, said instead of the lock-in restriction a ceiling could be fixed for the foreign firms to invest on a single issue. This could not only keep the foreign traders wedded to the market but also protect the bourse from events like "Mexico crash."

Facilities at ZIA

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Abdul Mannan, stressed the need for development landing facilities at ZIA.

The CAAB official, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star that it would take at best three weeks for the committee to prepare its report.

There are three recognized categories of airports in the world, based on facilities for flights and landing. In most of the European countries, airports are of CAT-3, the best category, because of the fact that flights are often required to make landing in foggy and inclement weather.

When asked an expert said not more than 20 flights a year have to face bad weather during landing at ZIA. There was no immediate need to upgrade it to CAT-3. He was, however, of the view that ZIA should be upgraded to CAT-2.

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