

## DOWN TO EARTH

### Exactions by Musclemen in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

It is reported that powerful groups of *mastans* (muscle-men) operate in the city to obtain illegal gains from different organisations and corporations on the issue of finalisation of tenders. According to sources, hundreds of projects of construction and repair work of various organisations are held up on account of interference by *mastans* making illegal demands for money from the contractors who are successful bidders for such works. In some cases, the *mastans* do not allow tender formalities to take their course, thereby standing in the way of many public welfare projects in the city.

Sometimes a Bangla daily reported several cases in which work could not proceed due to the illegal activities of *mastans*. In this context, it cited the suspension of work on the assembly hall of the Sishu Academy and several projects of the Dhaka University. If any compromise is reached with the *mastans*, the works get delayed in many cases. Work on the box culverts on the DIT road, cable lines of DESA and repair projects of the Dhaka City Corporation are said to be lagging behind on this account.

From various sources, it is learnt that contractors are subject to periodic exactions by *mastans* in connection with construction and repair works in various parts of the city. The *mastans* are said to have realised money in advance at the time of buying tender schedules of Titas Company and WASA and even on the day of submitting tender documents. Otherwise, interested parties are not allowed to take part in the tender process.

The enlisted contractors of many offices complain that on account of illegal exactions made by these heinous elements, estimates of tenders get inflated. This also accounts for low quality of work where the tenderers are forced to complete work within the original estimated amount.

From sources it is learnt that throughout the year seven or eight small or big construction projects go on in the Dhaka University campus. Groups of musclemen remain on the look out when the project works get started. The amount of illegal imposition claimed by the wicked elements and their associates depends on the extent of influence wielded by them. The Bangla daily quoted the instance of the recently completed F Rahman Hall where the contractors were forced to cough up Tk 4 lakh in illegal gratification to the wicked elements.

Besides the works of construction, the activities of such musclemen extend to other diverse fields, examples of which are enumerated below. Reportedly the businessmen and industrialists in Motijheel area are frequently subject to harassment and threats of violence by groups of illegal toll collectors. They force their way into different commercial offices in this area demanding subscriptions for various political parties, social organisations and cultural groups. Some businessmen in their anxiety to avoid unpleasant situations sometimes give in to their pressure. Others who hesitate or refuse are subjected to threats of harassment and violence. This is the normal pattern of illegal toll collection which affects other areas also.

It is reported that approximately three hundred trucks carrying cattle for sale enter the city from Aricha everyday. All cattle-carrying trucks are forced to stop at Gabtoli where organised groups of musclemen exact illegal tolls varying from Tk 200/- to Tk 500/- for each head of cattle depending on its size and physical condition. The organised gangs engaged in such illegal activities are said to have a wide network possessing considerable clout. It is reported that the total amount of such collections ranges from Tk 9 lakh to Tk 37 lakh every day.

Other trucks plying in the city are also said to be subject to payment of illegal tolls. According to a recent report, the total amount of such daily collections from the city's 10,000 trucks goes to the extent of Tk 30,000. On an average, each truck has to pay a small sum. Since those trucks which operate daily are made to pay at different points, the actual amount paid by a truck may be quite high. According to sources, the truck owners are greatly aggrieved by the continual fleecing of their pockets and it has become a serious cause for concern among the truck owners on account of the unbridled role of some *mastans* without any check by the traffic controllers who are sometimes alleged to be parties in such illegal activities.

Even some sections of rootless floating people who pass their nights on the footpaths of the city are forced to pay tolls at the rate of Tk one per head to some organised gangs for being allowed to use the footpaths. In this way such gangs earn Tk one lakh per night from one lakh people who take shelter on footpaths. These gangs operate in such areas as Kamalapur, Sadarghat, New Market, Farm Gate, Azimpur, Shantinagar, Mouchak, Khilgaon, Baitul Mokarram, Bijoyagar, Gulistan and Motijheel. Besides these places, open spaces in office verandahs, shopping complexes, rail stations, parks, overbridges provide shelter to many rootless people on their making payment of a fixed amount to certain anti-social elements who conduct a regular business in this line.

The agencies of law and order are largely found to be helpless in the face of the baneful growth of this evil phenomenon. It is, however, important and urgent that the relevant authorities responsible for orderly civic life should take effective steps for curbing the galling activities of these anti-social elements.

### SAARC : Common problems

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some world class products at the exhibition.

Bangladesh also expressed its keen desire to promote bilateral trade and export of medicines, ceramic wares, jute goods, leather and leather products.

Nepal said it was ready to discuss proposals to set up joint ventures.

Both sides also discussed the potentialities of the water resources which could bring benefit to millions of people in the region. Nepal also expressed its desire for harnessing her water resources if necessary by inviting foreign multi-nationals and donor agencies.

Bangladesh side offered transit facilities of the Mongla Port for export of Nepalese goods.

Begum Khaleda Zia described the official talks as very 'useful and fruitful'.

Emerging from the two-hour official talks at the Singha Durbar, the Prime Minister said that the acute water scarcity in the dry season was destroying the environment, agriculture, economy and industry of her country.

"Some 40 million people are affected by the water sharing issue and we hope and desire a peaceful solution."

Accosted by correspondents of the Hindustan Times and the All India Radio, and other foreign and local journalists Begum Zia said, "We are trying utmost to solve the water problem with our neighbouring country, but unfortunately it has not been solved till now. We will continue our efforts at finding a solution," she added.

Nepalese Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari was present while she was responding to questions.

When asked if the two prime ministers discussed the inclusion of Nepal in future water negotiations, Begum Zia said, "We believe India, Nepal and Bangladesh will participate in future discussions."

Replying to query from another Indian newspaper she said "We still hope that the Indian Prime Minister will come to Dhaka to resolve the issue." She said that the visit by the Prime Minister was long overdue to discuss the water issue.

Earlier, the Bangladesh Prime Minister was accorded a red carpet reception at Tribhuvan international airport this afternoon on her arrival in the Himalayan kingdom on a

two-day visit as SAARC chairperson.

The Prime Minister of Nepal Man Mohan Adhikari received Begum Khaleda Zia at the airport.

Begum Zia was garlanded in a warm traditional way by the *panchakanya*.

### King's audience

KATHMANDU, Apr 7: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia had an audience with King Birendra at Narayanhity Royal Palace tonight, reports BSS.

His wife Queen Aishwarya was also present at the time of the audience.

She, along with her Nepalese counterpart was conducted to the saluting dais from where Begum Zia took the salute. National anthems of the two countries were played.

The Nepalese cabinet members and other dignitaries were introduced to Begum Zia. SAARC Secretary General Y K Silwal, Bangladesh Ambassador to Nepal Syed Muhammad Hussain and ambassadors of SAARC countries, diplomats and high civil and military officials were also present at the airport to receive the SAARC chairperson.

### Adhikari

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meaningful way with other regional associations.

Appreciating Bangladesh's initiatives in establishing the SAARC, the Nepalese Prime Minister stressed the need for evolving mechanism to make the seven nation regional forum more people-oriented.

Lauding the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia in the region Adhikari said that they were fortunate to have Begum Zia's able and dynamic leadership at the time when the SAARC completed its first round of formation.

### Benazir

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the floor of the Senate and said: The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has had the honour of welcoming the distinguished Prime Minister of India.

He introduced Bhutto by saying she and the committee most of the time, we were talking about India.

Helms apologised immediately when he was told of his error.

### Khaleda lauds

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country Begum Zia said Bangladesh would extend every assistance to Nepal for facilitating and augmenting her external trade.

Through utilisation of ports and other infrastructural facilities, she said, Bangladesh would extend cooperation to Nepal to increase its external trade.

The Prime Minister expressed her firm belief that her present visit to the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal would further strengthen and consolidate the existing friendly relations between the two countries.

Describing Nepal as a country of magnificent scenic beauty and warm hearts, Begum Zia said, "It is always a pleasure for me to visit Nepal."

She underlined the need for utilising the untapped abundant human and natural resources of the two countries for the benefit of their people.

To achieve this target, Begum Zia said, the two countries must redouble their efforts for enhanced bilateral and regional cooperation.

Describing SAARC as the best framework for cooperative endeavours Begum Zia said "We must make full use of this organisation."

Nepal, she said, has always been at the centre of SAARC activities the Prime Minister said Nepal and Bangladesh share identical perceptions on important social issues related to the welfare of women, the future of the children, especially the girl child and the potentialities of youth.

She said poverty alleviation and trade liberalisation were high on the SAARC agenda.

Begum Zia said she looked forward to working closely with Nepal and other SAARC member countries on these crucial social issues at the forthcoming Delhi Summit.

### Clarification

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successfully launched research-based products principally for exports, the letter added: "... The company will settle its dispute with BSB." It also disagreed with the reference to the FIR of the Anti-Corruption Bureau while a civil suit is pending on the same subject.

A former adviser to the government, Rafiquzzaman was arrested on April 3 by the Bureau on charges relating to the defalcation of the BSB loan. He has been sent to the Central Jail after the CMM's court rejected a bail prayer. Later, the Dhaka District and Sessions Judge withheld an interim bail petition and set April 13 for hearing an appeal against the lower court ruling.



A big gathering at the main gate of the Arts Faculty Building on the first day of the admission test at the Dhaka University yesterday. — Star photo

### Hazardous radioactive equipment Tough measures to check indiscriminate use

By Masud Arif

Armed with a safety law, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) has formulated a set of stiff regulatory measures against indiscriminate use of hazardous radioactive equipment.

The proposed measures would include the setting of criteria for granting licence for operation of hazardous medical and testing equipment like X-ray, radiotherapy and deep therapy machines which use radioactive isotopes.

The BAEC felt the need for such steps against the backdrop of indiscriminate use of X-ray machines and other equipment which poses serious health hazards in the country, according to BAEC sources.

The commission has submitted a draft of the regulatory measures, prepared in the light of standards set by the International Atomic Energy Agency, to the Ministry of Science and Technology for its approval, the sources said.

The government had adopted the Nuclear Safety and Radiation Control Bill in July 14, 1993.

BAEC officials said machines emitting radiation would have to be installed in purpose-built rooms so that radiation do not spread across the specified area.

Besides, the BAEC will also arrange training for those using these hazardous machines, they said.

Meanwhile, the commission has undertaken a comprehensive survey of diagnostic and therapeutic X-ray machines throughout the country.

In addition, it also plans to increase public awareness of radiation hazards by publishing booklets and leaflets.

Nuclear scientists, however, noted that despite all these steps, the main responsibility in this regard lay with the doctors, technicians and persons who are involved in the operation of these medical equipment.

The BAEC has also taken up programmes for personnel radiation monitoring of occupational workers and assessment of radiation exposure, environmental radioactivity and radiation monitoring to ensure protection against the effects of ionising radiation, sources said.

The Nuclear Safety and Radiation Control Law empowers the BAEC to issue licences, orders and directives and adopt necessary by-laws and rules to control all sorts of activity related to the import, export and use of all types of radioactive materials.

### Tongi paura model polls

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activities regarding voters' registration and issuance of ID cards.

Receiving the allegations, the EC took their photographs afresh. Photographs of some 480 persons were taken on Thursday and over 100 people posed for their pictures yesterday.

Their cards would be prepared within a day or two, said Mohammad Khairuzzaman, District Election Commissioner of Gazipur.

He said, the response from the people was poor initially, but with the election day nearing, people have started converging for ID cards.

Habibur Rahman, Mohammad Nuru Bhuiyan, Nurul Bashar and Mokarram Hossain of Ward-3 alleged that their names were registered, but they were yet to get ID cards.

"We are working hard to correct the errors and most of the mistakes have been corrected by this time," said Khairuzzaman who is also assistant returning officer of the Tongi polls.

A youth engaged in taking photographs told this correspondent that they received some 10,000 allegations of incorrect information in ID cards.

"But most of the errors have been corrected," he said adding, "We are taking photograph today for the last time." Some 72 voters were not able to take their snaps on time, he said.

An EC official said alternative measures may be taken for those who are registered, but do not have ID cards. "We have covered some 90 per cent of the voters and it is enough for the first time," he said.

Khairuzzaman claimed that there was no violation of the code of conduct, no processions or mixing was reported so far and no candidate published individual poster.

But he admitted that they had received an allegation that a top BNP leader, who is also a minister, held a meeting in Tongi where he sought votes for his party candidate on April 5.

The Paurasabha (Election) Rules 1977, says "A person is guilty of undue influence if he uses any official influence or governmental patronage."

According to a 16-point code of conduct for Tongi polls, no candidate should arrange any individual public meeting or publish individual poster.

### Govt college teachers' strike from today

Government college teachers will observe a token strike from today to April 30 to press for promotion, recruitment of teachers and an enhanced pay scale, reports UNB.

This was decided at a joint representatives' convention of the two associations of professors and lecturers of government colleges, held at Government Bangla College in city yesterday.

The teachers will wear black badges during the work stoppage from 12 noon to 4 pm everyday, says a press release.

They will submit a memorandum to the Education Minister on April 25 and hold an extended meeting at Bangla College on April 30 to announce fresh programmes.

### Muggers hurl cocktails on police: 6 hurt

By DMCH Correspondent

Three policemen and three muggers were injured when the latter hurled cocktails at the police on duty near the western side of the Dhanmudi lake in the city yesterday morning.

Police arrested Jahangir, 24, Raju, 26, and Kaosar Hossain, 20. The three muggers who were held and beaten up severely by the police.

The injured policemen are Sub Inspector Noor Muhammad and constables A Jabbar and A Gani. They have been admitted to the Police Hospital.

Police also recovered two cocktails and a dagger from the muggers.

The muggers hurled crackers when the patrol police challenged their scooter in which they were travelling.

### CEC's appeal

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Group (SRG), a non-government body, organised the meeting as part of its voters' motivation campaign. The elections will be held on April 10.

"It's your election and you will vote according to your choice. But do not create chaos or indiscipline," the CEC said, adding, if necessary, summary courts would be set up for trial of violators of the election rules.

Referring to allegations of errors in identity cards, he said errors were found in a small number of cards, but both sides were responsible for the mistakes.

SRG convenor Feroz M Hassan and executive director Tariqul Ghani also spoke on the occasion.

### Hasina at Tongi

UNB reports: Sheikh Hasina yesterday led a silent people-to-people campaign in favour of her party candidate in the April 10 Tongi Pourashava Model Election.

Advocate Azmat Ullah Khan of Awami League is contesting as Chairman candidate with symbol "Umbrella."

Thousands of cheering people unfolding "Umbrella" followed the Awami League chief as she passed through different localities in this industrial town this afternoon.

There was no slogan and shout as seen in the traditional election campaigns. It looked like a silent procession of people with numerous umbrellas.

Smiling Hasina sometimes walked about and sometimes waved hands from her jeep to the people who stood along the route, balcony or roof-tops to have glimpse of the Awami League leader.

Awami League's chairman candidate in the model election Advocate Azmat Ullah Khan stood beside Hasina in her jeep holding his election symbol and sought blessing from voters. Awami League leaders Rahmat Ali, A K M Mozammel Haq and Ahsanullah Master also accompanied Hasina.

### Indian phensidyl seized

By Staff Correspondent

Police recovered 1350 bottles of Indian phensidyl and arrested 27 persons, including 25 drunks, from different areas of the city in the last two days.

Detective police conducted a raid in Kawranbazar area on Thursday and arrested 25 drunks and a liquor seller.

In another operation, they recovered 1150 bottles of Indian phensidyl from a building in Sayedabad area on Thursday.

Besides, one person was arrested and another 200 bottles were recovered from Gabtoli bus terminal yesterday.

## The Midnight File

### Indo-Nepal ties to deepen

KATHMANDU, Apr 7: Nepali Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari today hope that the traditional cordial relations subsisting between Nepal and India could be further deepened. The historical background, social and cultural ties and geographical proximity have consolidated the relations between the two neighbours, Nepal and India, he noted, reports Xinhua.

### Tajiks kill 13 Russian guards

MOSCOW, Apr 7: Thirteen Russian border guards were killed and 30 wounded today when Tajik Islamic opposition guerrillas attacked a Russian convoy on the Tajik-Afghan border. Interfax news agency said. The attack happened in the Kalakhum sector, some 200 kilometres (120 miles) east of the capital Dushanbe, the agency said, citing the border guards' press service, reports AFP.

### Zia was killed for deciding to ban Jamaat?

A group of freedom fighters yesterday alleged that President Ziaur Rahman was killed after he had taken the decision to ban the anti-liberation Jamaat-e-Islami, reports UNB.

Addressing a press conference at the National Press Club, leader of the group Lt Col (ret'd) Kazi Nur Uz-Zaman said they would lend their all-out support to unearth the truth behind the killing of two valiant freedom fighters — President Ziaur Rahman and Major General M A Manzur.

He said: We are thinking of forming a committee to collect information from retired and in-service army officers and others to dig out the truth and facts behind the killings.

The killings did not take place to benefit any particular individual, said Nur Uz-Zaman, a sector commander of the Liberation War.

"Rather the conspirators were the evil force which had become active soon after the liberation and had been running the state from behind the screen," he said.

He cautioned that the killers were trying to hush up the investigation into the killings and might conspire to bring a sudden change in the country's political arena.

### Hasina

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collapsed due to politicisation. "Everywhere, starting from appointments of teachers up to administrative officers, BNP background is being considered as the main eligibility of a candidate," she alleged.

On corruption, Hasina said there were specific allegations of corruption against 17 ministers, but the government did not allow the opposition MPs to discuss it inside the House.

"They are nurturing corruption," Hasina said adding "What is the benefit of sitting in a parliament where we will not be allowed to take any decision on the wellbeing of the people or against corruption and terrorism?"

Referring to fertiliser crisis, she said the crisis was created due to corruption and politicisation of BNP government, which had appointed fertiliser dealers from its party men to make election money.

On struggle for a caretaker government, Hasina said "We demanded at least three elections under a neutral non-party caretaker government to remove irregularities and ensure a smooth electoral system" as the Awami League wants to ensure people's rights to voting and their security.

"We had restored democracy by toppling the autocratic regime but the BNP killed it," she said.

### Artistes, FDC officials clash

By Staff Correspondent

A group of film artistes, security guards and some other officials of the Film Development Corporation (FDC) clashed at the FDC premises in the city yesterday.

No one was however, injured in the clash.

Sources said the trouble erupted as the security guards at the gate got involved in an altercation with three artistes when they were entering into the FDC premises at 2:30 pm.

### SKOP

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sulted by the opposition leaders before scheduling the hartals.

Talking to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, some of the trade union leaders disagreed with the Opposition contention that its programmes, would benefit the workers. They noted the labour bodies had lost confidence in the principal opposition parties which were reluctant to support the labourers' demands publicly.

"Therefore, we prefer to agitate for realising our demands from a separate platform and go ahead even without the support of the opposition parties which do not hold unanimous views on our basic demands," a prominent SKOP leader said.

Another labour leader, a critic of right-wing political parties, said that none of the major opposition parties including the Awami League supported the workers' demands as these parties shared the economic policy of the ruling BNP. "We're opposed to the ruling party as well as the mainstream opposition since all of them are protecting the interests of the imperialist countries," he said.

AL chief Sheikh Hasina, while exchanging views with the SKOP leaders on the prevailing political situation Tuesday, sought the labour bodies' support for the opposition movement for a caretaker government to conduct next general elections and assured her party's cooperation with the workers' April 11-12 strike.

The Left Democratic Front, an alliance of eight left-leaning parties, had also called a day-long hartal on April 11 protesting 'arrest of its leaders' during the front's March 25 half-day hartal in the city.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday opened dialogue with the labour leaders to avert the planned 48-hour workers' strike.

The government had signed an agreement with the SKOP and other trade bodies on their demands in June 1992. Three more accords were signed later for the implementation of the first accord. The labour organisations were now agitating for implementation of those.

### 11 injured

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sghati, 4 kilometres off the town, was held peacefully under strict security by party workers and police.

Vehicles were off the road and businesses closed during the dawn-to-dusk hartal in all the nine thanas of the district.

Six people, including a policeman, were wounded in front of Reserve Police Line when police lathi charged on APAC supporters to remove a barricade put up by them.

The APAC activists damaged 15 rickshaws and set fire to two, and damaged seven shops at different places of the town.

In the afternoon, five Jamaat activists were allegedly beaten up by the APAC activists at Kazipur when they were going to attend the meeting.

### Rao: Joshi

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minister.

After the meeting with the Prime Minister, Joshi told reporters that Rao had told him "Whatever happens in Bombay, it goes out to the world" apparently meaning thereby that any development in the megapolis could have its impact internationally.

He said the Prime Minister assured him of all assistance to resolve the problems faced by Bombay.

### Astami snan

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sands of years, have been taking this holy bath at this place on the bank of old Brahmaputra under Narayanangj Bandar thana, 13 km from Dhaka.

Different social and religious organisations have made elaborate arrangements for the peaceful and disciplined conduct of the bathing.

The auspicious time for the holy dip began at 8 pm today.

Devotees at 13 ghats along a one kilometre bank of the river took holy dips, reciting mantras.

The Narayanangj district administration has arranged special security and set up toilet facilities and medical centres for the occasion.

Besides, different private organisations including Red Crescent and the Ram Krishna Mission have provided volunteers.

### Nepalese DPM

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matter of 'serious debate' between the two countries.

Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari at a function of Nepal-India Friendship Association on April 5 said: "We cannot think about anything which adversely affects India's interest and India should also be motivated by similar sentiments."

The transit issue of using Mongla Port is also likely to be raised during Nepalese Prime Minister's visit. At the formal talks today between Bangladesh and Nepal, Dhaka officially offered Kathmandu the transit facility at Mongla Port.

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