

SAVE DHAKA

Traffic & Transport : Part-5

Evils at bus terminals

By Nazmul Ashraf



Disorderly parking of the buses at the Gulistan terminal always creates traffic jams. — Star photo

The inter-district bus terminals and the city service bus depots in the capital have virtually turned into havens for criminals, toll extortionists and smugglers for long. It is alleged.

Passengers are held hostages by a section of transport owners and workers who has literally established a state of anarchy at these bus stations with the help of professional hoodlums. Underhand dealings with law enforcing personnel are also widely alleged, sources in the bus stations pointed out.

If the alleged unholy alliance among the owners, workers, hoodlums and a section of law enforcers is 'affected', it results in unrest in the transport sector causing sufferings to the passengers, insiders say. Besides, they add, disputes over the shares of huge amounts of tolls, collected illegally on various grounds, frequently lead to armed clashes and consequent stoppage of transport movement in different routes. Furthermore, insiders reveal, organised gangs of transport operators sometimes opt for work stoppage whenever the passengers protest against their misconduct.

Innocent passengers, especially those new in the city, are usually harassed by a section of transport workers. A stranger in the city's bus stations, especially the inter district ones, often face harassment from the transport workers, who even go to the extent of assaulting them and often cheat them.

It's not a rare scene at the bus terminals that several bus employees start pulling an innocent passenger from sides in their bid to carry him to their respective vehicles. And in their habitual reaction, the workers abuse the passenger they have lost control over.

Such practices increase manifold during the Eid periods when the bus stations draw, eight to ten times the usual number of passengers.

The authorities seldom take steps to check such sort of harassments to the passengers. The routine job of the authorities hardly benefit the victims since those deployed in aid of the passengers reportedly side with the transport workers in their interests.

Sharing his bitter experience with this correspondent.

Mokhlesur Rahman, a businessman of Narayanganj, said, "I used to fall victim to the inhuman and indecent conduct of the bus helpers at the Sayedabad bus depot when I began my business visits to Chittagong early last year. I had to control my temper looking at some passengers roughed up by the organised gangs of bus employees for protesting such incidents. And now I don't have any problem since most of the bus workers are known to me."

According to an estimate, tolls amounting to around Taka one crore is collected monthly at the city bus terminals and the money is shared by the influential leaders of the owners' associations, trade unions and the gangs of hoodlums, sources alleged.

"For a new comer in the transport business, bribing the officials concerned and donating a handsome amount of money to the bus terminal 'leaders' are two tasks you cannot ignore for conducting a smooth business," said a bus

owner at the Gabtoli inter-district bus terminal, requesting anonymity.

"Any attempt to undo this illegal practice is bound to hamper getting route permit and cooperation of the associations concerned", he said and continued, "The story does not end here. You will have to recruit employees of their choice for your bus."

It is alleged that corrupt officials harass the transport owners and their employees whenever they challenge the 'illegal but established practice of earning money.' Rather, they have to surrender to the identified groups seeking their help in running the business smoothly.

Another owner of a Dhaka-Chittagong bus, operating from the Sayedabad bus terminal, admitted that maintaining good relations with the visibly powerful trade union leaders and the hoodlums is the best way to run the business unhindered.

According to insiders, the tolls are collected on various

grounds and pleas — in the names of different trade unions — registered or not, terminal committees, members of law enforcing agencies, checking overloading of buses, unloading of smuggled goods, introduction of new buses in different routes etc.

The terminal committees concerned are supposed to collect subscriptions for maintaining the terminals and resolve the problems faced by the bus operators. But the subscriptions for the purpose are reportedly realised eight to nine times the original rate and the additional money is misappropriated.

The toll collectors are learnt to have been backed by powerful quarters and sheltered by political parties.

The practice of toll collection is also going on at various traffic points, which frequently disrupts smooth traffic movement and sometimes leads to clashes among the toll collectors.

But no remedy to this persisting problem is yet in sight.

Kashmiris stage rally at ravaged site of shrine

SRINAGAR, May 22: About 10,000 angry Kashmiris today staged a rally denouncing the Indian government at the ravaged site of a 15th-century Muslim shrine which burned down earlier this month, reports Reuters.

In trucks and cars, waving black flags and shouting slogans against the India government, they travelled to Charar-e-Sharif, 30 km from Srinagar, to gather at the shrine.

"Freedom for Kashmir" they chanted. "Victory to Pakistan."

The destruction of the shrine to Sheikh Nooruddin

Garments workers

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The BGSF president, however, put forward a six-point proposal for consideration of the government, the United Nations, donor agencies and the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) about rehabilitation of the child labourers.

The proposals include listing of the entrenched child labourers, long-term rehabilitation programme with financial assistance provided by the BGMEA, the government, donor agencies and the UN, arrangements for providing primary education and Taka 700 education allowance for each of the child labourers and long-term loans for their self-employment when they are over 14.

Referring to the allegations made by garments factory owners that some foreign and local NGOs were hatching conspiracy to take the industry in their grip in the name of child welfare, Mohammad Khurshid Alam argued that firing of thousands of child labourers only in the face of outside pressure was not at all rational.

The BGSF leader urged the BGMEA to resolve the problem with the assistance of UNICEF, ILO, industry-friendly NGOs and trade union federation in the garments sector.

Wali, one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in the region, has inflamed separatist feeling in mostly-Muslim Kashmir valley.

The shrine and several hundred houses in the surrounding township were razed during a stand-off between the Indian army and separatist guerillas. The Indian army says the militants set the shrine on fire, but the guerillas and many residents of the valley blame the army.

Today's rally was organised by the all-party Hurriyat (freedom) Conference (APHC), a grouping of 30 Kashmiri political and religious groups.

Trucks carrying protesters to the shrine town were met by groups of distraught residents who have lived in makeshift shacks since their homes burnt down. Groups of women sang dirges, wailing out their misfortunes.

Angered by the destruction of the shrine, many residents of the valley say they will not vote in Jammu and Kashmir assembly elections.

Foreign ships

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metric tons of SSP fertiliser worth about Tk 6 crore.

Khulna Customs authorities informed the Ministry of Agriculture and National Board of Revenue of the matter and sought their clarification as the ships remained anchored there since May 15.

They, however, permitted the importers to release the fertiliser after receiving a clarification from the Ministry of Agriculture on May 20.

Customs sources attributed the confusion to a decision of an inter-ministerial meeting, held on August 14 last year, to impose restriction on the import and sale of the SSP fertiliser since these might be harmful for agriculture.

There remains no ban on the import of any sort of fertiliser from April 17 this year after the Cabinet cancelled the decision of the inter-ministerial meeting, the sources said.

Fate of ID card project

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possibly be provided with an ID card before the next general elections, due in only a few months.

The EC will hold a meeting with its technical committee, formed in connection with ID card project, in a day or two before taking a final decision.

One computer expert, who attended the meeting, told The Daily Star last night that it was technically possible to introduce ID cards for all voters.

"But the time is a factor, especially in a situation where tenders would have to be floated and other formalities completed was very crucial," he said.

It would be extremely difficult to collect the pictures and produce laminated cards, computerising a large number of centres throughout the country in the coming rainy season, he added.

The passage of the Election Commission Bill by Parliament late last year made the issuance of ID cards to every voter mandatory before the next general elections.

According to constitutional experts, that provision would need amendment by Parliament, possibly during the budget session next month, if the EC were to abandon the ID card project. Otherwise, the EC would be constitutionally bound to implement the project, no matter how long it takes.

Consequently, the polls would have to be delayed, which again, would require legislative action.

As things stand, the EC has little choice but to pursue the project, one senior lawyer pointed out, requesting anonymity.

Dhaka-Ctg train services disrupted

COMILLA, May 22: Train services between Dhaka and Chittagong were disrupted for several hours today following the displacement of railway lines at Bijoypur crossing, 12 miles from here, reports BSS.

The railway lines were displaced when a fast moving tank lorry was crossing the point in between Comilla and Lalmai stations.

A number of trains were stuck up both at the Comilla and Lalmai stations.

The train services in the section resumed around 9 pm following the repair of the lines.

Witnesses said the examinees went on the rampage to press home their demand for shifting the dates of the examinations.

Earlier, on Sunday a number of HSC examinees damaged vehicles on Mirpur road in front of the Dhaka College, making the same demand.

HSC examinees damage vehicles

By Staff Correspondent

A group of HSC examinees damaged at least 30 vehicles near the Titumir College at Mohakhali in the city yesterday.

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IFAD may shun funding

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Speaking about the IFAD's crop diversification Programme, Matia Choudhury said it would be difficult to make the projects successful as farmers hardly get fair prices for the monocrop like paddy in case of bumper production.

Maj (Retd) Akhtaruzzaman, MP referred to the IFAD's country portfolio evaluation on Bangladesh and said the world body had already spent a big amount on its projects in the country and was still looking forward to the challenges of the future.

"We have 2.3 crore acres of land and if two crore acres can be brought under modern agricultural cultivation, we will have an annual surplus of around three million tons," the BNP MP said, adding: "We need expertise and modern methodology to use our land for agricultural purpose."

Lutfullah Majid, the ERD Secretary, said IFAD projects designed indigenously were giving better results than those designed by other agencies.

Dr ATM Shamsul Huda stressed the need for local level structure for receiving the investment in agriculture.

"The willingness of the target

group should also be studied and analysed in this regard," he said.

Youssef Attiq of the IFAD said willingness and commitment were necessary for proper implementation of any project. "We must see there is participation from all concerned in the process of implementation," he said.

Dr. Rushid Islam Rahman of the BIDS put emphasis on a comprehensive assessment as to how to use the ground water for agricultural production.

The Midnight File

Benazir urged to hold talks with India

NEW DELHI, May 22: An Indian minister today urged Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to hold talks with New Delhi to end a lingering dispute over Kashmir. India is ready for a dialogue with Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir issue. Minister of State for External Affairs Raghunandan Lal Bhatia told a meeting of the ruling Congress (I) Party, reports AFP.

Israel freezes confiscation of land in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, May 22: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin halted today the expropriation of Arab land in annexed East Jerusalem to block a no-confidence vote in parliament which threatened to bring down his government, reports AFP.

It has been decided to suspend the expropriation of 53 hectares of land in Jerusalem and to set up a ministerial committee chaired by Rabin to re-examine the question. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told parliament.

The decision was taken unanimously at an emergency cabinet meeting in the parliament or Knesset building.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin called the meeting after he failed to persuade the Hadash Communist Party and Arab Democratic Party to scrap the no-confidence motion.

Environment Minister Yossi Sarid said: "The confiscation of land was from the outset a monumental stupidity decreed by people who failed to weigh the consequences."

However, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's spokesman Marwan Kanafani was less than

impressed with the decision to refer the confiscations, declared at the end of April, to a committee.

"I wish the Israeli order was to cancel the confiscation all together," he told AFP.

Uproar across the Arab world had failed to move Rabin, but he was left with no choice by the minority parties, who had right-wing opposition backing, if the government was to survive.

The five Israeli-Arab MPs pressed the motion deliberately to force the government to climb down over the confiscation of 53 hectares.

Neuter adds: Arab states have suspended their planned summit following Israel's decision to freeze its confiscation of land in Arab East Jerusalem. Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid said today.

Trade gap

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agreed that although both countries have undergone trade liberalisations, India lags behind Bangladesh in this regard.

India was accused of still maintaining significant tariff and non-tariff barriers on imports from Bangladesh.

The report said that several participants emphasised the need for harmonisation of tariff regime between the two countries, and, therefore, viewed that India should quicken its liberalisation.

The dialogue speakers were pessimistic about the efficacy of SAPTA in opening up trade regimes between the two countries. They expressed reservations against the item-by-item trade liberalisation, as envisaged in SAPTA, saying it would have a delaying impact on trade liberalisation.

Two-way transit facilities — movement of Indian goods to its north-eastern parts through Bangladesh, and trade between Bangladesh and Nepal through Indian territory — were recognised as beneficial to the concerned countries.

As for joint ventures, the Indian delegates said political uncertainty in Bangladesh had been a discouraging factor to Indian entrepreneurs.

Referring to Nazrul's role as a poet of Muslim renaissance, Begum Zia said that by his powerful writings, the poet had awakened the Muslim society.

She also recalled his unforgettable role in promoting communal harmony.

Quoting from the poems of Nazrul, the Prime Minister said he called for ending discriminations against women.

Referring to Nazrul's dreams and ideals, she said: "We have taken all measures to alleviate poverty, ensure economic progress and overall development of women."

Begum Zia also enjoyed a cultural session of Nazrul songs, recitations, dances and drama, which was arranged to mark the inauguration.

Earlier on arrival at the venue, the Prime Minister opened a four-day "Nazrul Exhibition" at the Shilpakala Academy art gallery. The exhibits include the poet's photographs, paintings, letters, dresses, books, audio cassettes, records and a documentary film.

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5 die in separate incidents

By Staff Correspondent

Five people including a young girl were killed and a teenaged boy was injured in separate incidents in the city yesterday.

Dipali Das, 20, of Lalbagh, who took poison Sunday afternoon, died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital at midnight last night.

In another incident, one Abdul Mannan, 35, was electrocuted at Katarua in the Mohammadpur area at around 12:30 pm.

A pedestrian Straj Miah, 60, was killed when a auto rickshaw ran over him at Agargaon at around 2 pm. He succumbed to his injuries on way to the DMCH.

An unidentified man aged about 30 was killed on the spot when a bus knocked him down on Airport road in the afternoon.

One Zakir Hossain, 30, was killed in the morning when a speeding bus hit him at Kapasia in Gazipur.

Farakka

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also added a word about the environmental effects of shrimp cultivation in the country's coastal districts.

Chief guest Col Akbar Hossain said environmental degradation should be prevented by raising the consciousness of the people as well as ensuring enforcement of laws relating to environment conservation.

"The environment has no boundary and it should be protected unitedly," he said while calling for a regional approach to resolve the staggering Farakka problem.

Now even the Indian people are raising their voice against the adverse effects of the Farakka barrage, which should be addressed for the sake of India's own citizens as well as for saving the northern region of Bangladesh from desertification and the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest, from salinity, Akbar said.

Speaking on the role of lawyers in protecting the environment, he said that the legal aspects regarding environmental conservation should be strengthened for creating environment friendly surroundings for the future generations.

BGMEA chief's offer

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The reason why the majority of the BGMEA members did not accept the MOU was that no assurance was provided by the negotiators—the US embassy, UNICEF or ILO—that the international buyers would accept the stipulations of the phased elimination of child labour by September 1, 1997, during the interim period, he added.

But the only assurance given to the association was that a campaign would be launched in support of the steps taken under the proposed MOU, Ahmed pointed out, while noting that many of the European and American buyers were seeking the total elimination of child labour from the garment factories.

The MOU, drafted after detailed negotiations with the US embassy and other international and non-government organisations, was rejected by the BGMEA members in an extraordinary general meeting on May 17, and unilaterally declared the total elimination of child labour by October 31, 1995.

Ahmed denied having made any assurance that the MOU would be signed, saying that even the authority to draft the MOU was approved in a general meeting of the BGMEA, on condition that it would be placed before an EGM for final approval.

"I have tried my best to convince the members at the EGM to vote in favour of the proposed MOU and I myself was in favour of approving it. But it was rejected by a majority of the members," he said while refuting the Coalition's charge that he had failed to adequately inform the members about its contents.

Responding to a question, the BGMEA chief, said that if his letter to the Coalition fails to elicit a favourable response, he would still lead a delegation to the US to meet them personally.

He added that he has also been in touch with government officials about the latest developments and has sought help from the country's missions abroad.

The Child Labour Coalition, in its letter, said it will launch a media campaign by distributing packets containing information about child labour in Bangladesh garments factories to inform the American people.

It said the boycott will re-

244 murders in April alone

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A total of 244 murder cases were recorded in the country in April last as against 209 such cases in the previous month, reports BSS.

This was revealed at a meeting of senior police officials which reviewed the country's crime situation during April held at the police head quarters, the meeting was addressed by Inspector General of Police ASM Shahjahan.

Additional Inspector General of Police, Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner and DIGs working in Dhaka were, among others, present in the meeting.

Diarrhoea breaks out in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, May 22: More than a 100 people were admitted to the local Medical College Hospital and Foudz-arhat Hospital with acute diarrhoea in the past two days. But no death reports were received so far.

People of the Agrabad area are the worst affected, sources said.

ADC General of the district Hedayetullah said the approximate loss could run up to Tk 2 crore as 500 thatched houses and vast tracts of crops were damaged in 42 villages of five unions of the thana.

Hanif

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oned their actual number could be more than four lakh. "How many of them are plying the streets could be anybody's guess," he said.

Conceding that the illegal rickshaws could not be driven out overnight, Hanif suggested their phased elimination. The current drive against the unauthorised rickshaws is the first step towards phasing out the illegal three-wheelers.

The City Corporation officials could not give any cumulative figure of how many illegal rickshaws have been seized since the campaign was launched last month.

But they said the DCC in cooperation with the Metropolitan Police confiscated 40 rickshaws a day on an average.

Meanwhile, stringent steps by the DCC to confiscate unlicensed rickshaws have shot up rickshaw fare because the unauthorised three-wheelers have gone into hibernation for fear of police swoop.

IFAD may shun funding

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Meanwhile, speakers taking part in a dialogue in Dhaka yesterday on the IFAD report also strongly pleaded for proper monitoring and evaluation of IFAD projects undertaken for poverty alleviation in Bangladesh.

The dialogue was organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in Cooperation with the IFAD at Sonargaon Hotel.

The CPD Executive chairman Prof. Rehman Sobhan acted as the moderator in the dialogue which saw interactions on policy issues on the IFAD projects being implemented in the country.

The IFAD officials who attended the dialogue included Dr. Cavizel Lothar, Yossef Attiq, Boudhayan Chatterji, Atiqur Rahman, Dr Flasayed AA Zaki and P Spitz.

Matia Choudhury of the Awami League said IFAD projects on deep tubewells and shallow tubewells for agricultural production had, more or less, been successful.

"But other projects did not provide desired results," she observed.