

Urban Transport

Almost all newspapers, especially our own, have written extensively about the suffocating traffic situation in the city. Nothing really happened. Now that the World Bank has come up with a US 121.7 million dollar project, things might start moving. Unlike us, the World Bank perhaps can have a greater influence on our policy-makers, since it can provide funds for what it is proposing.

However, what the WB project preparatory mission has said is neither new nor original. In fact the suggestions are eminently commonsensical. We need to build more roads, rationalise the slow moving vehicles with the fast moving ones, and put more buses in the streets. We would like our policy-makers to take a serious look at the recommendations of The Daily Star Roundtable held at the BUET, and the subsequent one held at the Nagar Bhaban, where a detailed plan of action was suggested by the participating experts.

The one element that does not seem to come out in the World Bank suggestions is the long-term need to build a mass transit system. Either a railway around the city, or underground trains will have to be thought about. Dhaka is terribly short of land, and the use of underground space will have to be considered today or tomorrow. A Calcutta underground has shown, flooding is no problem.

As for the plan at hand it seems to lay more emphasis on improving bus services. As it points out, compared to 50 per cent elsewhere, only about 10 per cent of urban dwellers of Dhaka use buses. The suggestion that many more buses will have to be introduced on our roads should be examined with care because this implies a reduction in the use of rickshaws. There could be some impact if the measure were taken, but it may not be immediate. So, what will happen when many more buses crowd into the already overflowing streets. The idea of premium bus service is a good one, and may help make many car users opt for this service thereby reducing pressure on the roads.

But whatever urban transport system is proposed, it will have to be preceded by a serious will to govern the urban space. What we are suffering from — much more than the traffic and hawkers problems — is a total lack of urban governance. The most dramatic aspect of which is that there is no single authority of any sort to look after the totality of the city's problems. Our first Roundtable put forward the suggestion that one 'City Coordination Body' should be formed. Like many other good ideas, this also has not been acted upon by the present no-action government.

A Regular Hell

On Thursday night an alleged mugger was beaten to death at Monipuripara. Jasim, 22, was said to have tried, together with two others, to snatch money and valuables from an auto-rickshaw driver at 10. On Saturday, 20-year-old Jamal was beaten to death by a mob. He was said to have stolen shoes from the Lalbagh Mosque.

Beating one to death — can one in one's senses visualise the act? Specially when the beating is done by, say, *mussallis* just coming out after saying prayers or by mutually unfamiliar people rushing in to save someone in distress, it beats all imagination. Crime has a motivation that leads to the act. How can perfectly normal and ordinarily law-abiding citizens band with strangers in minutes and kill one deliberately without giving it any thought at all.

Lynching in the open in a city is something unheard of. By this token Dhaka, in spite of its jungle of concrete and eight million plus population, continues to be a village of some barbaric past. How could this backward travel in time be possible in a town that for centuries had been known for its culture and humanity?

Two things come inescapably to mind for an answer. Poor, nay bad governance — governance that not only looks away when people take law into their own hands but also indirectly encourages its own components to act criminally as in the case of protecting wayward students and rapists in uniform, is one contributing factor.

Two, too many people caged in too little a space. Dhaka's is decidedly the densest population in the world, denser than even Tokyo and Mexico City. The two factors have combined to make a regular hell of Dhaka's city life. But both these factors are eminently amenable to healing. With understanding and resolution, a leadership that knows its stake in the continuation of this hell, can usher in a change for good very certainly.

Exam Disaster

The elimination of the admission tests to HSC courses came quite unexpectedly and was welcomed enthusiastically in these columns. We said the task was to make the examinations, specially SSC, dependable as an evaluating mechanism, which seemed to have been recognised in the move.

Now the performance of the different boards, specially the most pampered one, the Dhaka Board, in the last SSC exams has set us wondering if our welcome was not a little premature.

Due to unpardonable mistakes at the moderation level, the results of about 54 thousand pupils of Dhaka Board have been affected adversely. At the outset of the reassessment process it was found that Fidousi Hussain and Faisal ibne Redwan, placed ninth and 11th respectively in the Science Group, have indeed secured first place together with two others already declared joint first. It appears that many others from among the affected ones would get an improved result. But this should come before the colleges finalise their admissions to HSC. Or the poor students would be doubly victimised.

Ah, but a Man's Reach Should Exceed His Grasp...

BROWNING'S Andrea del Sarto, the 'faultless painter,' tells of his consuming passion for beautiful, unscrupulous Lucrezia. The painter, perhaps because of his natural human indulgence failed to reach the artistic stature and excellence of Michealangelo and Raphael or Leonardo Da Vinci.

Andrea del Sarto, a renaissance painter, embodied in the spirit of the time in learning and acquiring all the knowledge that was classical, failed in the litmus test of going beyond his self to rank with the universal appeal of the paintings of his time. The 'faultless painter' was found to be waiting and faulty in his devotion to the pursuit of knowledge that was required of him to become a timeless painter.

The meaning is all too obvious acquisition of knowledge and total dedication needs devotion from the pupils who will be requisition to take lessons from teachers and gurus in an atmosphere conducive to the pursuit of knowledge.

A fractious atmosphere given to chaos and listlessness hardly produces great pupils or great work of art. The ancient dictators may not have learnt all the arts of modern warfare but they knew very well that to defeat a nation culturally, morally and otherwise, one must destroy the seat of learning — universities and libraries in particular. The pillage of Alexandria and the world's greatest library by the Romans, the sack of Baghdad by Halaku Khan and the destruction of

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Nalanda University are but a few examples. In our own recent experience, one of the targets of the Occupation Force in former East Pakistan, was the seat of learning, and those who imparted knowledge. Thousands of books were destroyed and with that private libraries, including some of the teachers of Salimullah Muslim Hall, where I spent four glorious years as a resident student.

In late '80s, probably in 1989, Alexander Dubcek travelled from Prague to Europe's oldest university Bologna to receive a degree of 'honoris cauroa' for what was termed as his contribution to the flowering of democracy in Eastern Europe. Dubcek, known for his role in causing the Prague Spring who defied the mauling armageddon of not-so-friendly Soviet tanks, looked a very simple and humble person. Simple to the point of being evanescent — but he made no mistake in his acceptance speech in underlining the need for education of mind and soul in order to make a great country. His reference to the role of the monasteries in the Middle Ages in Europe in imparting knowledge to the people was significant. In the private exchanges he particularly mentioned the St. Benedictine monastery of Monte Casino irradiating knowledge throughout Europe in the

Dark Age.

The pattern is almost identical. In Nalanda (6th to 5th century B.C.) most celebrated Buddhist Monastic Centre, also known as university, in Modern Patna district of Bihar, the system of knowledge was imparted in a very ascetic and disciplined atmosphere. The Chinese pilgrim Huan Tsang, stayed in Nalanda and tells us how impressed he was particularly

edge. No wonder the Movement of the Renaissance started from the Monasteries which devoted themselves, to a great extent, to the study of such classical authors as Aristotle and Plato.

Later on in the 12th and 13th centuries, universities were established in Oxford, Cambridge and in Paris. Other early universities in Europe were at Prague (1348), Leiden in Holland (1575), Uppsala

seated on bare and stark wooden benches in its old tradition. The idea is to instill in the pupils not only a sense of belonging to the college, but also to the great need of human-beings to learn and enable themselves.

The system of tutorials pursued by the Oxford University and holding of occasional seminars on burning issues of the day are perhaps the most important elements in the curricula. They not only allow individual talent to grow and mature, but also to bring them face to face with the views of other people. My moderator in International Trade and Finance, Peter Oppenheimer, often used to say: "The first principle of liberal education is always to leave the pupils alone."

The recent platinum jubilee celebrated on September 21 by the Dhaka University, my alma mater, like many readers of this column, was naturally a day of days for all of us to celebrate. Mr. P. J Hertog was appointed the first Vice-Chancellor of the University on December 10, 1920. Interestingly enough, the establishment of the Dhaka University by the British Raj was not because of any altruistic notice of the Rulers. As the Governor of Bengal, Lord Litton, the first Chancellor of the Dhaka University, stated in 1922: "The establishment of the Dhaka University was a

compensation for the abrogation of the Partition of Bengal in 1911."

Once known as the Oxford of the East, we were genuinely proud to have the opportunity of graduating from this once-prestigious seat of learning. Professor Razia Khan's reminiscences struck me as most genuine and natural. University is not only the highest seat of learning, it is also the place where the leaders of tomorrow will be trained and produced and for that education, unhampered and unencumbered by any forces, not germane to the sanctity of the Academia, can do that.

When strict adherence to conformity is to be eschewed for the efflorescence of persona and talent, introduction of elements not known for their purely academic consideration, are not helpful either. The true rejoicing will be on the day when we can all work towards restoring the traditional sanctity of the Academia, allowing pupils to develop their own talents in a variety of ways to fill in the need of the society.

On the face of it, seventy five years may not be a very long journey for the University. But it is significant. It will be more so, if a national consensus can be developed to grant this seat of learning true 'academic freedom' in a global and universal atmosphere, so that the university can finally help its pupil to reach out to exceed his grasp — or what is heaven for.....?



Waliur Rahman

with the benevolent approach of the 7th century ruler of Kanacy Harshavardhana. The Nalanda University continued to be the greatest centre of learning in India up to the Pala dynasty (8th to 12th century A.D.).

As a matter of fact, the Modern University evolved from the medieval schools system known as 'Studea Generalia'. Almost without exception the earliest Studea grew out of people's effort to educate priests and monks so that they could be utilised outside cathedrals and monasteries to impart knowl-

(1477) in Sweden, and Heidelberg (1386), and Harvard University in 1636 in the US.

Oxford University of the day and partly Cambridge continue a tradition which is conducive to helping your personality to grow. They make you roadworthy. Even today on the night when there is a High Table in honour of a guest or a special visitor, the College Chaplain stands up and reads, grace, thanking God the Merciful and Munificent, for giving them yet another opportunity to break the bread. The students who partake of the dinner are

Nepal's Journey through Democracy: Twists and Turns

by A M M Shahabuddin

THE nascent democracy of Nepal has made a new turn for the better. After a brief shock and jolt, it has been put on the rail again to continue its ambitious journey ahead. In 1991, Nepal made its debut with a multi-party parliamentary system, the Nepal Congress (NC) becoming the single majority party in the parliament.

The country was ruled for the first time as a full-fledged democracy with G P Koirala as the Prime Minister for about four years, when it collapsed due to infighting within the Congress leadership. For this, Nepal Congress had to pay a heavy price as they lost to their arch-rival, the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) in the mid-term election held in November 1994, following the resignation of Koirala.

The NCP-UML emerged as the single largest party in the parliament with 88 members in the 205-seat House. The Nepal Congress came in second position with 80 seats and the right-wing Rashtriya Prajatantra Party became third, winning 20 seats, followed by a small party — Nepal Sadhbahna Party (NSP) with three seats. Thus the new Nepal cabinet was headed by a communist leader, Monmohan Adhikari, for the first time in a country known for its long-standing conservative and rightist thinking. It was definitely a U-turn in Nepal's domestic politics.

'Solo Flight of the Communist Party' This was undoubtedly a unique and an unexpected new turn for democracy in Nepal. Some took it as a revolutionary change in Nepal's socio-political scenario, with a right-about turn from a centrist to a leftist government. The Communists naturally drummed it up as a victory of communism. Some

thought the Communists were shrewd enough to exploit the surging nationalist forces of a new rising Nepal to their advantage, placating the anti-India plank as their strategy for winning election. So they did it very skillfully to ground their arch-rival — the Nepal Congress.

But it became apparent that this euphoria of communist victory was a mere temporary phase, almost a passing show. Because it was quite evident that the Communist Party can't rule the country for long with 88 votes in their favour in the Parliament as they can't do any legislation without the support of their rivals who were waiting in the aisles for the final jump. So the 'solo' flight of the communists fell flat when they had to face a no-confidence motion moved by the Congress and supported by others.

In this critical situation, the King, following Adhikari's recommendation, dissolved the parliament and ordered for another mid-term election in November next, which would have been a costly luxury for a country like Nepal, one of the ten poorest of the world. The King could have saved the situation by inviting the Congress to form government. But he went the other way.

'The King Did Wrong' So there came another twist when the opposition parties took the issue to the Nepalese Supreme Court to declare the King's order as "unconstitutional." The legendary saying that "the King can do no wrong" couldn't be showered on the Nepalese King as the Supreme Court put it otherwise. The court, upholding its independence and neutrality, declared the King was "wrong" in his order dissolving the Parliament and fixing a new mid-term election. Now the King had to bow down before the court verdict and invite

the Nepal Congress to form government, following which Sher Bahadur Deuba has now assumed prime ministership. Thus the multi-party democracy in Nepal ran a full circle in 10 months, opening now a new vista to the Congress. Now it is for the Congress to show its mettle to prove worthy of the responsibilities given to it. Moreover, Nepal has been saved by the court from wasting a huge sum of money on another mid-term election. Last year's election had cost over Nepal more than 23 million US dollars which is said to be enough for a literacy drive for 200,000 Nepalese people.

'End of Rana Dynasty' Nepal, a land-locked, to be more precise, an "India-China locked" country, popularly known as the 'Sanghri-La', stands there for ages. Basically, a feudalistic society, with a close-knit centrist philosophy, it has been ruled by the feudal lords, known as 'Rana Dynasty' and also by an all-powerful monarchy. The Rana Dynasty ruled over a century as hereditary prime ministers from 1846 to 1951, when the Nepalese Congress Party overthrew the feudal Rana regime, thereby ushering in for the first time a democratic regime. But the Congress also brought in an "evil necessity" in the monarchy which had been in force since the 40s. Following a general election, Nepal Congress was voted to power, under the prime ministership of B P Koirala. But some dark clouds were hovering over Nepal's political scenario. King Tribhuban, who was rescued from his exile by the Nepal Congress, had his own scheme of things, to thwart the democratic process.

'Constitutional Monarchy' In 1990, Nepal Congress and its rival the Nepal Communist Party launched a country-wide joint agitation to cut the absolute monarchy to its proper size. And King Birendra was forced to declare himself as a constitutional monarch, handing over all power to the people of Nepal. That was a great triumph for democracy and again a new turn to march forward. As aptly pointed out by an editor of a Nepalese journal: "... we are successfully experimenting with democracy, without resorting to any other way out." And under the new arrangement the Nepal Congress was returned to power in a general election held in 1991.

'Tasks Ahead' Now the Nepal Congress government, headed by Sher Bahadur Deuba, has embarked on its new mission. It will have to do some exercise in tight-rope walking in its relations with two giant neighbours — India and China, keeping in full view its national interests and sovereignty. Welfare of the common man of Nepal should

be the cornerstone of the government policy. The Congress Party should avoid such actions and steps that may go against the overall interests of the country, providing a big leverage to its rival parties to fish in the troubled waters, particularly in the next general elections. It won't be out of context here if India's future role vis-a-vis Nepal is mentioned. As a "big brother" of the SAARC family, India should now try to win confidence of the Nepalese people by showing reciprocity to Nepal's expectations and national aspirations. Whatever might have been the lapses in the past, they must be corrected and put on the right track. For this, India will have to go some mileage, offering concessions, wherever necessary, to mend fences with Nepal. A prominent English daily of Calcutta, *The Telegraph*, in an editorial some time back, had rightly said: "Unless India embarks on an immediate damage limitation exercise, there can be serious repercussions on bilateral relations. In fact... it (India) must endeavour to establish a relationship of trust and cordiality in the national interest."

'The King Makes His Move' In 1960s, under the King's order, the parliament

was dissolved. Koirala was arrested and political parties were banned, making the 'deck' clear for the King to impose his direct and absolute rule over Nepal. This was perhaps the most shocking jolt for Nepal in its journey through democracy. It took a more harsh turn when the King's direct rule was given a 'face-lift' through the introduction of one-party Panchayat system and the rule was further augmented through a plebiscite held in 1980. (A good resemblance with Basic Democracy system introduced by President Ayub Khan in Pakistan in the sixties). It took Nepal about a decade to break through this dark period of Nepal's history.

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Weakest Link in the Chain

India, as a leading and most powerful industrial country in this region, is expected to further strengthen the SAARC-chain binding this region. As the saying goes: "A chain is no stronger than its weakest link." Here Nepal seems to be the 'weakest link' in the SAARC chain. So it needs help and cooperation to build up its national economy for the prosperity of the nation. India can show the path by allowing Nepal maximum economic and trade facilities, including granting a 'trade route' through its territory, for movement of goods to and from Bangladesh. This would undoubtedly pave a new way of building a better future for the SAARC countries.

OPINION

Hartal and Freedom

Hasina Zaman

The pictures in the front page of *The Daily Star*, September 17, 1995, brought tears of rage and disbelief to my eyes. A gentleman, who was duty-bound to attend office, was on his way to his place of work. He was waylaid by a group of young pro-hartal pickets, who stripped him despite his pleas and requests. This despicable incident was photographed by some journalists and displayed in the front pages of their respective dailies. The person not only suffered the utmost humiliation of being stripped in broad daylight in the middle of a main road at the hands of some over-zealous youths, but his humiliation was further aggravated when his nakedness was exposed to the whole nation by means of those photographs.

I appreciate the need of the news media to jolt the public mind by printing such sickening pictures (my mind was sufficiently jolted to make me write this protest-note poste-haste). But I couldn't help wondering about the effect of these pictures on the gentleman and his family. The traumatic experience coupled with nationwide exposure could result in a permanent damage to a sensitive mind.

As citizens of a free and democratic country, we have certain fundamental human rights and freedom guaranteed by our Constitution, which also guarantees "... respect for the dignity and worth of the human person..." Among the fundamental rights are the freedom of movement and freedom of thought and conscience. The gentleman, in exercising his right to the aforesaid rights, was punished by those who supported the programmes which rob the citizens of those very rights. The opposition political parties give call to the nation to observe hartals on one plea

or another. This call of hartal, for your information, has been given 58 times since the present government came to power through democratic process. The nation "responds" to these calls and makes hartals "successful", thus adding to the myth of "spontaneity" and "support" claimed by the opposition leadership.

If, as claim the opposition parties, the nation responds spontaneously: why must they worry about a few stray cases of non-compliance? Why must they position their supporters at strategic points in order to harass and coerce support from those nominal few who dare exercise their rights to freedom of thought and conscience? Why can't they allow a healthy opposition to their programmes, so that the concept of freedom and fairness which is the basis of their demand for a caretaker government, may flourish? Neither fairness nor freedom is manifest in the humiliating and inhuman way people who choose to differ are treated by the "Frankensteins" created by the hartal-callers.

Decency and a sense of responsibility should dictate (1) a prompt apology from the leaders of the opposition parties to (a) the sufferers of such gross indignity and to their families, and (b) to the nation as a whole; (2) a strong condemnation of the shameful act (instead of any justification of the same, as one political figure tried to do); and (3) a firm control over the activities of their young and over-zealous supporters so that offences like this are not repeated in the future.

On the part of the Administration, strong action, in the form of apt punishment, should be taken against such offenders in order to establish the rule of law.

To the Editor...

Scar on Society

Sir, The picture that got the front page coverage in almost all the dailies (17.9.95) depicting a gentleman being stripped of all his apparel by a section of doltish picketers bears the fact that such senseless act devoid of all civility has not only humiliated the gentleman but the society as a whole by pointing out how low the civic sense and manner have taken a plunge. That could only be perceived so shockingly and shamefully by every sane citizen who, I believe, would fail to find a proper language to abhor such indecency and uncouthness cropping up now-a-days in some over-enthusiastic political zealots.

This act, I believe, would not be endorsed by any political party and the culprit caught would be punished subsequently but the humiliation meted out to the gentleman would die down hard as he might not well recover from the psychological impact soon. As for the opposition par-

ties hartal is presumably an inherent democratic right, so is the democratic right of a citizen to move around unhindered without fear and fright. During hartal, no democratic political party would recommend any violent and vulgar act, rather its success depends on the spontaneity of the people. But alas, we now find that the political intimidation on people by a section of activists who are out to terrorize the people by blasting crackers, damaging vehicles, burning ambulance and a new vulgar trend of abusing human rights and dignity of the citizen on street, which proves that the politicians have either lost control over these so-called activists or politicians themselves prescribe such perverted performance.

The opposition political leaders, for their own political interest, should apologise for this indecent incident and take care to admonish their supporters from repeating such indecent act of ignorance and at the same time the government must also

ensure that civic sanity and peace is not disturbed during hartal.

Md Jalaluddin Iqbal
Mohammaddpur, Dhaka

Sir, I think it would be more apt to call Bangladesh not a land of six seasons but of seven, as another is added now, named 'hartal'. This new season can begin at any time of the year. Other seasons present us with varieties of flowers, fruits and vegetables. Though this new one does not offer us flowers and vegetables, yet it would be wrong to say that we do not get some sort of fruits. People have to digest the sour fruits which grow through the activities of opposition political parties in demand of a caretaker government, not caring about people's untold sufferings and the severe blow inflicted to our economy. They are professing that it is being observed to ensure us the right to vote but in the process they are depriving the people

of their basic rights.

We have passed through 32 hours and 72 hours hartals and are afraid to think what is in store for us in the coming days. Either caretaker government is formed or not, the opposition political parties are ruining their chances to win in the next general elections as people have become extremely vexed and accept all these agitations as unreasonable. People would think twice before casting votes in favour of those political parties whose supporters are capable of doing what has reportedly been done to few gentlemen on the first day of hartal in Dhaka. People are horrified and outraged and demand exemplary punishment for those involved in the incidents and seek assurance from the opposition political parties that it would never happen again.

Nur Jahari
East Nasirabad, Chittagong