

DOWN TO EARTH

Perils From Fire In City

By A S M Nurunnabi

In the process of rapid expansion of the Dhaka city, proper care does not appear to have been taken by the authorities concerned for adopting appropriate measures against fire hazards in it. We saw the consequences in a number of big incidents in the past. However, the devastating fire at Bangabazar last November brought into bold relief the inadequacies and handicaps suffered by the Fire Service Department in dealing with big fires in the city.

The total number of existing fire stations in the city is ten. This set-up, which came into being three decades ago, has remained unchanged till now, even though there has been manifold increase in population and physical growth of the city. From sources in the Fire Service Department, it is understood that the existing fire stations in the city have been operating under severe strains of inadequate and worn-out equipments. Even the normal complement of equipments in a fire station in the city is said to be lacking. In view of this deficiency, in the case of a big fire in a particular area of the city, it sometimes becomes imperative to send out calls for help to nearby fire stations which pitch in to deal with the situation.

Besides, these deficiencies in infrastructural and supporting facilities, two main factors are identified by the Fire Service Department sources as standing in the way of their prompt and effective fire fighting capability. The first of these factors which proves highly frustrating in the matter of quick movement of fire engines to the sites of fire out-breaks is the horrendous traffic jams which at present plague almost the entire network of city roads. These traffic jams are said to be a serious handicap in prompt and efficient fire-fighting operations. Moreover, the congested ar-

eas in the city, and the sprawling slums, both in the old and new parts of the city, which are fire-prone, figure as a fire fighter's nightmare because of their difficult locations. Some of the lanes and by-lanes in the congested areas are so narrow that in case of fire, access of fire engines with their fire tenders becomes impossible.

In this context, the mushroom growth of plastic factories, the large number of tanneries at Hazaribagh using various chemicals, and the highly congested shopping complexes are no less vulnerable to fire hazards.

In new Dhaka, we are confronted at present with another kind of problem in the matter of fire-fighting. There is a growing trend of construction of high-rise buildings. In such buildings, adequate provisions for fire security are a must. We are fortunate that there is not yet any serious outbreak of fire in any high-rise building in the city. At present, our equipments for fire-fighting in high-rise buildings reportedly consist of only one snorkel which can reach 90 feet height and one Turntable Ladder (TL) which can reach upto 190 feet. These equipments are not considered adequate in the light of such facilities in some modern cities like Hong Kong and Singapore.

In such a situation, fire consciousness and periodical fire drills among residents of such buildings go a long way in promoting fire security. It seems obligatory for RAJUK to ensure that no plan for high-rise building gets approved without due provision for fire security as vetted by the Fire Service Department, where necessary. Even in residential areas with projected houses of low heights, the RAJUK may keep in view the aspect of

NDA to take part in polls

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an alliance of seven parties including Freedom Party and Democratic League yesterday announced its decision to take part in the sixth parliamentary elections, reports BSS.

Announcing the decision at a press conference, Secretary General of the NDA, Anwar Zahir said in view of the present political situation it is now clear that if the elections are not held in time as per the Constitution, a 'no government situation' would be created endangering the national independence and sovereignty.

Earlier the gunmen, who hijacked the ferry on Tuesday in the Black Sea port of Trabzon with about 200 hostages, had said they were preparing to surrender and naval authorities ordered all vessels to clear the area.

"From our point of view we hit our target," one of the gunmen, speaking by cellular telephone, told the private ATV television minutes before the surrender.

Witnesses earlier said a medical team moved in just hours after the 3,838-ton vessel anchored just outside the Bosphorus strait on Friday morning after the hijackers headed a Turkish warning not to enter the strategic Bosphorus waterway.

Anatolian news agency later said a total of eight people were evacuated.

2 chopped to death in Khulna

KHULNA, Jan 19: Two persons were chopped to death at midnight Thursday night by unknown assailants under Rupsha thana, 16 kilometres from the city.

Azim Molla 35, and his cousin Ahad Molla, 30, were found dead in the fish enclosure, according to police.

'PSI should cover

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Customs authorities do not take into consideration international and internal price variation as they assess on the basis of pre-decided tariff value of a product or commodity while the PSI agencies face price variation factors as they always have to keep track of day to day price fluctuation of different commodities in the international market.

The study said that there has been loss of earnings because the same items imported through PSI carry less customs duty than those through traditional system and assessed on the basis of tariff value.

It also alleged that a number of PSI entities accepted deliberately under-invoiced documents as the basis for price verification ignoring international price verification procedures adopted by PSI entities world-wide.

The government banned import of eight items under the PSI on December 12 last suspecting misuse of the system and "to protect the local industries and revenue". The banned items are: car, dry cell battery, air conditioner, filament lamp, fluorescent tube light, GI pipe, soda ash and caustic soda. The four other banned items

were cigarette, powdered milk, cumin seed and black pepper.

On the other hand, the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) strongly favours continuation of the PSI system saying, the only alternative is "to go back to the much misused old valuation procedures."

The PSI services are used by the private sector in Bangladesh under Section 25A, Customs Act, 1969 and SRO and Notifications. But the PSI entities are not supervised under the GATT principals, the study pointed out.

The Uruguayan Round Agreement recognises that the GATT principles and obligations apply to the activities of PSI, mandated by government or assigned government bodies. The obligations also include non-discrimination, transparency, protection of confidential business information, avoidance of unreasonable delay, use of specific guidelines for conducting price verification and avoidance of conflicts of interest by the PSI agencies.

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia placing wreath at the mazar of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman on the occasion of his 60th birth anniversary yesterday. — Star photo

Picnicker, three others killed in accidents

By DMCH

At least four persons, one of a picnic party, were killed and six injured in separate incidents yesterday in the city and at Daudkandi and Dholeswar.

Four persons of the picnic party were seriously injured when they fell from the roof when the bus, returning from the National Park, was passing through a tunnel near the Sangsod Bhaban in the evening.

They were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where fatally injured Babul (30) died and the others, Nurul Islam (25) and Abdur Rahim (26) were admitted. Another injured person, Monsur, was shifted to Hasina

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next election and this is why they do not want the caretaker government to conduct the hustings.

"We want a non-partisan caretaker government to restore the voting rights of the people," she told the gathering.

The Awami League president asked the Prime Minister to step down to pave way for constituting a neutral caretaker government to conduct a free and fair voting

One Aktar Hossain, 18, received bullet injury in his left leg at Hazaribagh, during a clash over a cricket match between the two rival teams yesterday. Aktar was rushed to the DMCH.

Sohail, 15, a grocer was stabbed at Nayatola, Moghbazar late Thursday night in his hand and leg for his refusal to provide cigarettes to a gang of muscle men on credit. He was later admitted to the DMCH.

Kharshida Akter, 25, allegedly committed suicide at a residence at Kamrangirchar under Lalbagh thana on Thursday night.

In another accident, Abdur Rashid, 60, died when a micro bus ran over him near Daudkandi ferry ghat late Thursday night.

The Prime Minister also opened the voluntary blood donation camp at the mazar premises.

Leaders of different front organisations of BNP also placed wreaths at the mazar of Shaheed Zia.

Zia's birthday

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Liberation.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia visited the mazar in the morning.

She placed wreath at the mazar and offered fateha.

BNP Standing Committee members Irrigation Minister Majidul Huq, Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Housing and Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia, Agriculture and Food Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Health Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Labour Minister and city BNP President Mir Shawkat Ali, among others, were present.

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Call for hartal in Khulna today

From Our Correspondent

KHULNA, Jan 19. The HSC examinations have called a half-day hartal in the city tomorrow demanding cancellation of the government's decision to introduce same set of question paper in the HSC examinations under four boards from this year.



The Dhaka City Awami League brought out a torch procession yesterday protesting police action on the party procession at Farmgate Thursday afternoon. — Star photo

Family feud overshadows Rama Rao's funeral

HYDERABAD, Jan 19: Film star turned politician N T Rama Rao was cremated on a pyre of sandalwood today in a funeral overshadowed by the bitter family feud that had haunted his final year in politics, reports Reuter.

The family infighting that cost the charismatic politician his job erupted in full public view when his widow was ordered off the cortège before it proceeded to the cremation site.

"I have been humiliated by the family members," said Lakshmi Parvati, second wife of Rama Rao.

"I will boycott the funeral," Parvati told reporters as she left for home from Hyderabad's Lal Bahadur Cricket Stadium, where her husband's body had lain in state.

Populist Rama Rao led his Telugu Desam Party (TDP) to a landslide victory in elections in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh in December 1994.

But he was ousted as chief minister by his son-in-law, Chandrababu Naidu, in a family coup nine months later that was triggered by Parvati's unwelcome political influence.

Aides said the 73-year-old former actor died of a massive heart attack early on Thursday while doing physical exercises.

Rama Rao's eldest son N Jayakrishna lit the funeral pyre, made of sandalwood logs and ghee, or clarified butter, in accordance with Hindu tradition.

Family members, film celebrities and leading Indian political figures watched, some in tears, as Rama Rao's body was consumed by the flames.

Away from the cremation

site at the Buddha Purnima complex on the Hussain Sagar Lake nearly 100,000 people milled around the city centre and Rama Rao's home to bid farewell.

Family tensions had flared earlier today during Hindu religious ceremonies over Rama Rao's body, Parvati said.

Parvati complained that her name was left out of the vedic hymns chanted by priests. She said only Rama Rao's first wife, who died 12 years ago, was named.

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Referring to the abortive

dialogue, the Jamaat leader

said the Prime Minister's

intransigent attitude frustrated

all efforts of the Opposition

to resolve the political crisis

through discussion.

The Midnight File

Ciller asked to form govt

ANKARA, Jan 19: Turkey's caretaker Prime Minister Tansu Ciller said today she had been given the chance to form a new government after