

DOWN TO EARTH

City's Livability At Stake

By ASM Nurunnabi

ervers, the continuity of the traffic mess is no less damaging in its impact on the economy than the absence of adequate communication infrastructure with the northern region of the country (which the Jamuna Bridge is designed to improve). The stupendous magnitude of the city's traffic mess can be gauged from an interesting remark made by an observer to the effect that one who can solve the mess deserves a Nobel Prize. It is felt that the most urgent call of the moment is for measures based upon both short and long-term approaches in a fashion that ensures proper functioning of existing facilities.

While we are loath to learn about city management from the rest of the word and polemics in this respect may continue in terminably, it is reassuring to learn that under the aegis of the UNDP, a crash programme for improvement of the traffic system of the city has been taken in hand. Work is reportedly underway for construction of underpass near Gullistan, Gabtoli bus stand and Kawranbazar. Besides, there are approved proposals for construction of overbridges near Malibagh crossing, Ilysiyah Hotel premises, Ittefaq crossing, Banani-Kaloli crossing, GPO-Yeamani

The livability of the Dhaka city has been steadily coming under a serious threat. The city's population will cross the 10 million mark by the turn of the century, according to the United Nations Population Fund. But to visualise any corresponding improvement in the services of public utility seems to be an idle dream. Already the quality of life in larger parts of the city has deteriorated to an alarming extent owing to a multiplicity of factors which are fully identified in course of detailed discussions through various media and at different forums.

Of these factors, the too prominent one that emerged is the dreadfully burgeoning traffic jams that bedevil almost the entire network of city roads. The rates at which the city population and the road transports are increasing, one need not have much foresight to predict that the city's livable prospects may be jeopardised in the near future unless adequate measures are timely taken to meet the challenge. The pervasive traffic jams are daily affecting the life of all classes of people in such a manner that the resultant losses in terms of time and money are incalculable, and causing grievous inertia in the economic life of the country. In the opinion of serious ob-

market crossing, Bangal crossing and Dainik Bangla crossing. These measures, when completed, will, however, serve as palliatives only in solving some of the city's traffic problem.

But to many, the villain of the story is said to be the massive presence of rickshaws in the city. To deal with it as a priority matter, it is felt desirable to phase them out gradually from the main arterial roads of the city. To reduce the backlash from the rickshawpullers, it has been suggested by some that they may be allowed incentives in such cases where they volunteer to ply on side streets and minor lanes. Such rickshaws may be painted with a different colour and the pullers of such rickshaws may be given benefits such as free schooling for their children, wheat for work, training facilities for switching over to auto-rickshaws with provision of loans on easy terms for hire purchase of such vehicles.

Dhaka's population is growing at the rate of 6 to 7 per cent each year. At this rate, the city's inhabitants will be doubled in the next 10 years. Against this background, there is no cause for illusion or complacency in the relevant quarters as to how to cope with the attendant problems that such a growth will bring about.



A bus plunged into the DND canal at Conapara near the city yesterday. — Star photo

Pakistan to seek Altaf Hussain's extradition

KARACHI, Feb 2: Pakistan said today it would seek to extradite Altaf Hussain, leader of the ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM), who lives in self-exile in Britain, reports Reuter.

Pakistan has no extradition treaty with Britain, but Interior Minister Nasserullah Babar told reporters: "The government is working on the extradition of Altaf Hussain. It will take some time to process."

He said the government had compiled evidences, including confessions of arrested MQM members, against Hussain whom it accused of directing violence in the city of Karachi.

Babar said about 600 people, including "terrorists," had been arrested in Karachi since July 1 last year and violence in the city had now subsided to a large extent.

"Life is quite normal now in Karachi," he said.

About 1,950 people were killed in ethnic, political and sectarian violence in Karachi in 1995 and more than 100 have died this year.

The government blames most of the violence on the MQM, which speaks for Karachi's majority Urdu-speaking Mohajirs, who migrated from India at partition in 1947, and their descendants. The MQM blames the security agencies.

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GCO calls strike at DU today

By DU Correspondent

The Ganotantrik Chhatra Oikya (GCO), a combine of some left leaning student organisations, has called a strike at the Dhaka University today.

The GCO called the strike demanding exemplary punishment to the persons responsible for barbaric attack on the DU students and resignation of the Vice Chancellor.

The warm-up meeting on this resort island 690 kilometers south of Bangkok gives the Asian nations a chance to finalise their agenda and plot strategy for the summit.

The historic significance is that for the first time you have the ASEAN countries, with China, with Japan and the Republic of Korea meeting together, talking about political and economic issues in preparation for a meeting with the European Union, said Philippine Foreign Minister Domingo Siazon, Jr.

The Association of South-east Asian Nations, or ASEAN, includes Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and the Philippines.

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They added that the outlook for the currency remains bleak, despite continuing comments from Indian officials that present dollar levels aren't justified by the current economic situation.

Dealers widely agreed that the heavy dollar demand has been prompted by the Reserve Bank's failure to intervene strongly to protect the currency.

The Times of India today quoted top sources as saying that Sharma "wanted to ensure that the rule of law prevails and the corrupt are brought to book."

Sharma, a former member of the ruling Congress (I) Party, had on the eve of last week's celebrations marking India's declaration as a republic, urged a mass drive against corruption, saying it was neither "endemic nor insoluble."

He had also appealed to top leaders and bureaucrats to set a "salutary example of rectitude, high standards of personal conduct and accountability."

Sources at the presidential palace here told The Times that Sharma, who held a one-to-one meeting with Prime Minister PV

Narasimha Rao last Wednesday, was miffed with the delayed inputs he was receiving about the case.

Sharma was, however, not taking sides, they added.

"The effect it (the scandal) is having on the country's polity is a matter of concern for all institutions of the case. The president's concern for accountability should be seen in this regard," a source said on condition of anonymity.

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Bus plunge

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till last night whether the driver of the bus was alive or was killed in the accident.

The fire brigade, salvaged the badly damaged bus, using a crane, in the afternoon.

Our Nature Correspondent reports: A 70-year-old woman and an unidentified man aged about 40 were killed in two road accidents at two points on the Dhaka-Rajshahi highway in Natore yesterday.

Nasim Beowla died when she was run over by a Rajshahi-bound bus at Kanakihali. The man, along with his bicycle, was sandwiched between two trucks from coming opposite directions at Char Baidyanath in the afternoon.

Police held the driver of the bus and seized the bus and the two trucks but drivers of both the trucks managed to escape.

Our Staff Correspondent in Sylhet adds: A 45-year-old woman was killed and two were injured in an accident on Sylhet-Moglabazar road.

A Sylhet-bound truck collided head on with a tempo at Lamabag at about 2:30 pm. Moinu Bibi, 45, died on the spot.

The body was sent to the MAG Medical College Hospital morgue here for autopsy.

54 DU students still in jail

By DU Correspondent

Fifty four students of the Dhaka University who were arrested during the raids on the Jagannath and Salmullah halls and sent to the central jail were not released till last night, according to a university source.

A total of 95 students were arrested during the raids. The rest were released on bail on Thursday.

Most of the students had left the Jagannath hall after the heinous attack on Wednesday, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the condition of the students who were injured during the attack and admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital are improving.

One person carrying a portable cassette player wanted her to listen to 10 songs he had composed for her. Security guards have recorded at least six instances of men trying to approach her, the Asian Age daily reported.

Ms. Gandhi is regarded by many Indians as a potential political leader. Her father, grandmother Indira, and great grandfather Nehru were prime ministers for a total of 38 years.

Ms. Gandhi's angular features became well known after Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in 1991, though she is rarely seen in public for security reasons.

But she apparently has no idea of what her suitors are up to. "Neither Priyanka Gandhi nor any member of her family had any knowledge, whatsoever, of the letters allegedly written by Professor S S Maitra," said Victor George, a family aide.

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Ciller has failed to form coalition govt

ANKARA, Feb 2: Prime Minister Tansu Ciller today abandoned attempts to form a government with the center-right Motherland Party, reports AP.

Motherland's leader Mesut Yilmaz rejected all my offers," Ciller told reporters at the end of her 40-minute meeting with her rival.

Ciller said she would formally notify President Suleyman Demirel tomorrow of her failure to form a government.

Yilmaz said he turned down Ciller because she insisted on remaining premier. She is serving in a caretaker capacity now.

Ciller's True Path came in second in general elections six weeks ago behind the pro-Islamic regime Welfare Party.

Welfare's 158 deputies in the 550-member Parliament remained far less than the required majority of 276 to form a government alone.

Ciller received the mandate after Welfare's leader Necmettin Erbakan failed to form a coalition.

Both Ciller and Yilmaz rejected Welfare for its anti-secularist policies.

Ciller offered Motherland a coalition partnership in which both the prime minister and the deputy prime minister, two posts that would be shared between Ciller and Yilmaz, would have equal responsibilities.

Demirel told reporters today that he would designate Yilmaz next. Motherland has 132 deputies.

Ciller said it would be pointless for Yilmaz to start negotiations with her. "Nothing is left to talk about between us," she said.

Ciller claimed that Yilmaz turned her down because he was inclined to form a coalition government with Welfare.

"We have not ruled out coalition partnership with Welfare although it is going to be very difficult to reach common ground with it," Yilmaz said.

Amu demands probe into Ashraf's death

JHALAKATHI, Feb 2: Awami League leader Amir Hossain Amu today demanded an enquiry into the death of a Jubo League worker in Nalchity thana of the district, reports UNB.

Ashraf Ali was picked up from his village home on January 30. He died on the same day. The post-mortem report said he was tortured to death.

Addressing a condolence meeting here in the morning, Amu demanded exemplary punishment to those responsible for the "killing".

He blamed the BNP government for failure to maintain law and order in the country and said the glorious role of the Army has been dwarfed by calling them out in the name of arms recovery.

Presided over by District Awami League president Advocate Shahjahan Ashraf, the meeting was also addressed by district Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami, Advocate Haider Hossain and CPB leader Bimal Kumar Saha.

Meanwhile, a gayebana janaza for Ashraf was held in front of Jhalakathi Battal Mukarram mosque today. Amu and other opposition leaders attended the janaza.

Amu also visited the residence of Ashraf at Barakaran village in Nalchity thana and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family members.

AL demands arrest of SA Khaleque

Awami League General Secretary Zillur Rahman yesterday demanded arrest of BNP candidates SA Khaleque for firing on a peaceful anti-election procession at Hariampur in Mirpur constituency, reports UNB.

In a statement he alleged that Nasir Uddin member of Awami League, Appu of Jubo League, Rafiqul Islam of Chhatra League and many others were injured in the firing.

Zillur said SA Khaleque in presence of police fired unprovoked on the processionists who spontaneously protested the one-party farcical election.

He demanded exemplary punishment of the BNP candidate.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Radio, TV to air speeches of 11 party chiefs

The Election Commission yesterday sent letters to the leaders of 11 political parties and alliances, who have fielded 30 or more candidates in the coming Jatiya Sangsad elections, asking them to submit the scripts of their speeches to the commission by February 5. Election Commission sources said, reports BSS.

The leaders of those parties and alliances will get the opportunity to address the nation over radio and television.

Radio and television will simultaneously broadcast the speeches of the party chiefs from 6:30 pm each day from February 8 to 12.

The sources further said the leaders would be allotted time varying from 10 to 40 minutes to highlight their party objectives and manifestoes.

The parties and alliances are: The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), seven-party alliance, Freedom Party, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan, National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Bangladesh Muslim League (Jamir Ah), National Democratic Party (NDP), Pragotishil Ganotantrik Shakti (Progos), Janadal, Jatiya Nagorik Sanghati and Gano Adhikar Front.

10 hurt as JCD, BCL clash in Cox's Bazar

COX'S BAZAR, Feb 2: At least 10 people, including two policemen, were injured during a clash between pro-Awami League Chhatra League and ruling party's Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal in the town today, reports UNB.

The clash began when the Jubo Dal and JCD processionists hurled derogatory remarks at Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina this evening.

Chhatra League workers protested the remarks and attacked the processionists.

Police rushed to the spot and charged batons to disperse the feuding groups.

The ruling party supporters brought out the procession in protest against ransacking of the BNP office on Thursday.

Two injured police officers were admitted to Sadar Hospital.

Tension was prevailing in the town.

Fire leaves 10 injured in Keraniganj

By DMCH Correspondent

A fire reportedly sparked off following a blast in a gas line left at least ten people including five children injured yesterday at a house at Par Gandaria under Keraniganj thana.

The fire broke out after the gas line behind the house exploded, according to the injured and police.

Of the injured, three women and their five children were identified. They are Nazma, 32, Fatema, 25, Jotsna, 30, Parul, 5, Sumon, 5, Al Amin, 4, Badrul, 3 and Rina, 3, were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), hospital sources said.

In another incident, a fire broke out at a slum near the Kutcha Bazar at Zigatola in the city at around midnight last night.

Fire fighting units from Mohammapur and Pallasey rushed to the spot immediately and extinguished the fire, according to police sources.

Asian FMs meet to set agenda for ASEM

PHUKET, Thailand, Feb 2: Foreign ministers of 10 Asian nations gathered today in an unprecedented meeting to set an agenda for the region's first-ever summit talks with European leaders next month, reports AP.

The first Asia-Europe Meeting — ASEM — will take place in Bangkok March 2-3, to be attended by heads of state of ten Asian and 15 European countries.

The warm-up meeting on this resort island 690 kilometers south of Bangkok gives the Asian nations a chance to finalise their agenda and plot strategy for the summit.

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