

DOWN TO EARTH

Plight of City Commuters

By A S M Nurunnabi

In the rapidly expanding Dhaka city, the urban population find it exasperating everyday to go to their places of work or attend to their other business. In keeping with the high tempo of growth in the whole gamut of activities in the spheres of trade, business, industries, public services, etc. the housing, communication and other ancillary facilities have not kept pace. As a result, a sizeable part of the urban dwellers has to live in places beyond the limits of the metropolis. In the cities of the developed countries also, a large number of people commute to the city centres from far-flung areas. Their commuting has, however, been made easy on account of the developed states of their communication and transport systems. These facilities are lacking in our country.

The number of suburbs from which commuters come has steadily increased. Among the more important of such suburbs, we may mention Tongi, Azampur, Gazipur, Kaliahor, Kapasia in the north; Savar, Nayabari, Dhamrai, Singra in the northwest; Narayanganj, Narasingdi in the east and north east; Keraniganj, Ziqaira, Kamrangir Char across the Buriganga river and Sonargaon, Rugganji, Demra etc in the south east.

The brunt of transportation from these places is borne by private or public buses. The bus system on the whole is not very regular and efficient. Unfortunately, as pointed out by some observers, as far as suburban transport and overall transport system is concerned, we have taken a giant step backwards during the last decade. As examples, it has been cited that suburban trains have almost ceased to run and the wide-bodied buses have become fewer in number.

which means, in other words, while no new amenities have been added, some old amenities have been allowed to disappear. It is, however, true that the number of commuters who depend on trains, launches and boats is comparatively limited. But during the monsoons when certain places in the suburbs are not negotiable by bus, launches and boats become the only alternative. The construction of the China Friendship Bridge over Buriganga has considerably helped easy movement of the people from areas such as Keraniganj and Zinzira. Even now, quite a good number of traffic is carried by small ferry boats across the river.

The lot of the local commuters is not also a happy one. It is common experience that as soon as one steps out and boards a public transport in the city — be it a rickshaw or an autorickshaw or a tempo or a bus or a minibus — one falls at the mercy of its driver. You can't avoid this hazard if only you like to walk, but there is a limit to one's physical power in covering long distances.

On board a rickshaw, you have got to be very alert about the conduct of the rickshaw-puller while he is driving his fragile vehicle. He seems to feel ashamed if he can't overtake other rickshaws in front of him. The passenger becomes helpless as his word of caution goes unheeded. The passenger at the same time feels apprehensive that if he is too persistent in his cries of caution, it might distract the rickshawpuller which might prove more hazardous.

A passenger of autorickshaw may feel a little safer. But he may also become a victim of the craze for speed activating its driver, particularly if the driver is new and young.

A bus or minibus journey is perhaps the safest of all. But there are snags in it. Once you get into a bus or minibus, you seem to lose your identity as a human being. If you fail to get a seat, your situation as a standing passenger is constantly subjected to continuous pressure from the conductor who is very particular about his mission for inducting more passengers. Perhaps, in a way, the passengers standing on the footboards get more fresh air as compared with the stuffy interior of the bus, but they run the risk of being dashed by other vehicles or slipping into the road.

It is thus clear that the misery of the city dwellers and also those from the suburbs commuting on public transports knows no bounds. There was a feeling of some relief among the commuters when the BRTC recently announced that they were soon to procure a good number of public buses to ease the present unhappy transport situation. At the same time, it seems urgent the authorities concerned give incentives to the private operators in the transport sector so that we may expect some improvement in the lot of the commuters.

At this stage, it's idle dream to expect that to cope with the rising volume to commuters in the Dhaka city, it would be possible for the government to take examples set in cities like Calcutta, Tokyo, Hong Kong and also in Philippines and Indonesia, to go for mass transit system by pushing upwards from street level or downwards below ground to set up light railway systems. But there is no doubt that since a similar situation is fast developing in our city, it is just a question of time when solutions will have to be found in similar mass transit facilities.

No more disunity

From Page 1

ence of money and muscle power," said the former prime minister. Begum Zia hoped that all political parties and groups would contest the coming general elections under the non-party caretaker government.

In her six-page written statement, the former prime minister also described the recent political developments leading to the transfer of power to the caretaker government, criticised her political opponents for their recent non-cooperation programme, listed the achievements of her party while in power and expressed her party's confidence in the caretaker government in holding a free and fair poll. Later, she replied to various questions from the journalists.

Yesterday's press conference was her first since the BNP quit state power on March 30. She, however, informally appeared before the press twice and addressed two public meetings in the city during this period.

As regards her experience since she quit power, Begum Zia said: "It is of great pleasure. People now joining our rallies, meetings and processions in larger number than they did while we were in the government."

Begum Zia reiterated her party's confidence in and support to the caretaker government and hoped it would be able to ensure neutrality and impartiality in all spheres of the administration while discharging its duties.

She expressed gratitude to the people for what she said, their continued support to the BNP but alleged that many of its leaders and workers and their houses or business establishments were being attacked by those jealous of the popularity of her party. "We could retaliate in a similar way but we want a peaceful atmosphere and election at the earliest," she added.

The BNP Chairperson said they depended on the caretaker government for rapidly improving the law and order in the country and hoped there would be an immediate end to the harassment of the leaders and workers of the party.

Begum Zia accused some of her political opponents of delivering provocative statements year after year, taking up farcical programmes and destroying property of the people and the state. They even spoke or acted in a way which amounted to treason, she said adding, "We overlook all those things for the sake of peace, consensus and democracy."

The BNP chief reminded the journalists of their sacred responsibilities and urged them to refrain from writing in a motivated way and partial truth. Replying to a question, Begum Zia said her party was always for unity of all nationalist forces and added they were working for such unity ahead of the coming general elections.

BBC to look into allegations against its Bangla service

From Page 1

Asked if BNP would forge electoral alliance with the Jatiya Party, which also claims to be a nationalist one, she said that BNP was the nationalist force, not the Jatiya Party. BNP came into being much earlier than JP. She, however, added "In politics nobody is a permanent friend or foe. Time will say everything."

To a question if her party would take an anti-Indian stance in the campaign for the next elections, she said it was not opposing India and wanted good relations with all countries. Asked what would be the next step of her party, Begum Zia said, "Preparation for the upcoming polls."

Responding to another question on allegations of corruption against her and other BNP leaders, she said, "These are simply to confuse the people. They failed to produce any document in the fifth parliament to substantiate their claim."

Begum Zia told another questioner that if her party has to sit in the Opposition after the coming polls, it would not take up destructive programmes like non-cooperation. "You saw we did not take up any such destructive programmes in our nine-year agitation against autocracy. In future too, we'll do everything considering the prevailing situation."

Present at the press conference, among others, were Abidus Salam Talukder, Saifur Rahman, Khanakder Delwar Hossain, Jamiruddin Sircar, Majedul Haq, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Chowdhury Kamal ibne Yusuf, Nazrul Islam Khan among others.

Recover arms from Jamaat-Shibir activists: Menon

Workers Party general secretary Rashed Khan Menon yesterday (Friday) said the people would spontaneously come forward to aid the caretaker government if they were ensured food and security, reports UNB.

Speaking at a workers' meeting at the party's central office here, Menon said primary responsibilities of the caretaker government included keeping the prices of essentials within the people's purchasing capacity, uninterrupted production in mills and factories, ensure workers salaries and bonuses and fertilizer for the farmers along side the arms recovery.

He said it was a matter of wonder that when the Jamaat-Shibrites were openly showing their arms strength at various places in the country, there was no report of arms recovery from their possession till to date.

Menon urged the caretaker government to seize arms from Jamaat-Shibir activists. The meeting was also addressed by Haider Akbar Khan Rano, Kamrul Ahsan, Abul Hossain, Raghib Ahsan Munna and Akhter Sobhan Masrur.

2 JCD activists held in Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Apr 5: Two JCD activists were arrested and another activist was stabbed reportedly by rival group in the town yesterday.

The arrested are Kayes Ahmed and Kayes. Kayes Ahmed was arrested in an arms case from the Sylhet airport in the afternoon. The other activist was arrested from a house.

Meanwhile, JCD activist Enamul Haque, 25, was stabbed in Subid Bazar area of the town. The JCD blamed the Islami Chhatra Shibir for the attack.

Council convenor Advocate Shamsul Haq Chowdhury has sent the allegation letter to BBC authorities on behalf of the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Ainijibi Samannay Parishad, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA), Bangladesh Tax Lawyers Association, Dhaka Lawyers Association, Diploma Engineers Association, Bangladesh Primary Teachers Association, Jatiya Kabita Parishad, Dhaka Tax Bar Association, Bangladesh University College Teachers Association, Muktiyoddha Sangshad, Engineers Coordination Committee, Bangladesh Krishibid Parishad, Swadhinata Chikitsakh Parishad, Beter Television Shipli Sangstha, Bangladesh Private Medical Practitioners Association, Sammlita Sangskritik Jote, Group Theater Federation, Bikhulda Nagarik Samaj, Bangladesh School-College Teachers Association, Supreme Court Bar Association, Bangladesh Bar Council, National Primary Teachers Association, Grass-root People's Organisation, Bangladesh Government Secondary School Teachers Association and Bangladesh Freedom Fighter Teachers Commando.

"We have genuine reasons to believe that the BBC programme of last few days in Bengal is designed to confuse the Bengali listeners and malign the popular non-violent movement for democracy," the council alleged.

While appreciating the past role of BBC, especially in 1971 during the War of Liberation and the anti-autocracy movement in 1990, the council in a letter to BBC said that unless it takes appropriate and adequate measures to ensure its non-partisan objective reporting, the civil society of Bangladesh may think of talking a public position to expose the partisan role and motive of BBC reporting in Bangladesh.

DSE trading

From Page 1

Current account deficit, declining foreign exchange reserve, rising interest rates, reducing GDP growth and increasing food import in our country are creating fear among the foreign investors, Imtiaz observed. Further foreign investment will depend on the next government's financial policy, he said.

She briefly recalled the background of the caretaker government and said people earned it at the cost of blood. She urged the people to remain alert against any conspiracy by the BNP to mar the hard-earned victory.

Hasina said, "I asked



Taiwan Prime Minister Lien Chan met 50 representatives of 30 Taiwanese business associations in China at the parliament in Taipei yesterday. The representatives held a public hearing in which they asked the government to sign a peace agreement with China in a bid to ease tensions across the Taiwan Strait. — APPUNB photo

Cong reverses decision to expel 5 leaders

NEW DELHI, Apr 5: India's ruling Congress (I) today reversed its decision to expel five of its top leaders who have announced plans to run against official party candidates in upcoming general elections, reports AFP.

Congress spokesman Vithal Gadgil said the expulsion orders issued earlier this week for the five leaders including former textile minister Kamal Nath and former human resource development minister Madhavrao Scindia were invalid.

Mr Nath or anyone else does not stand expelled as of today," he said in a reversal of his previous statements that expulsions were "automatic" for those who filed papers against official Congress candidates in the fray.

They are Congressmen till they are expelled by specific order," Gadgil told reporters a day after he asserted that Nath had been booted out of the party for filing nominations against an official candidate.

Political observers said the U-turn was a desperate move by the now-shaky Congress to woo back the five leaders into the party fold ahead of the elections, which is widely expected to produce a hung parliament.

The party spokesman reversing Thursday's retaliations against the former textile minister said the Congress constitution did not provide for automatic expulsions of members.

"I have now gone through the provisions of the party constitution. The true position is that such persons cannot be expelled."

They blamed organised groups for creating violence in the city, including Rajshahi University campus, but no action was taken yet.

Musclemen being hired to capture polling booths

NEW DELHI, Apr 5: Various political parties have reportedly started booking trained wrestlers with the announcement of Lok Sabha election dates, reports BSS.

There are several camps which are popularly known as "Akhras" in adjoining areas of Indian capital. The unemployed young boys are imparted training in such camps. They are used to guard politicians, to threaten people for the crucial votes and if required to capture a polling booth, said a story in The Times of India on Wednesday.

Most of the musclemen do not have any political loyalty. They are available on hire for rupees 20 thousand to rupees 25 thousand per muscleman for booth capturing while the fee for land grabbing, the amount varies between rupees one lakh to five lakh for a group of half a dozen of musclemen, the story said.

The training camps of musclemen are matter of concern for the police as such camps are used as hideouts for the goons during election, the story said, quoting police sources.

Hasina: Clean up admin

From Page 1

League president urged the caretaker government of Justice Habibur Rahman to constitute an enquiry committee to investigate "corruptions" by family members and relatives of former Prime Minister Begum Zia, BNP ministers and MPs and to try them.

Hasina also urged the caretaker government to see "how the former prime minister could use the national flag in her car, spend money from the public exchequer and enjoy protection of the Special Security Forces (SSF)."

Kamal calls for violence-free campus

By Staff Correspondent

Gano Forum president Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday said that terrorism should be wiped out from all educational institutions including universities for the greater interest of the nation.

He said everybody should discard the political parties which shelter the terrorists. Dr Kamal was talking to a group of students from different educational institutions, including Dhaka University.

Jamaat to put candidates for all 300 seats

The Jamaat-e-Islami will put candidates for all the 300 seats of Parliament in the coming election which the objective to transform the country into an "Islamic welfare state," reports UNB.

This was announced by Jamaat Prof Ghulam Azam while winding up the emergency session of the party's central working committee in the city on Thursday, said a press release yesterday.

The Jamaat chief asked the party leaders and members to immediately begin a door-to-door campaign conveying invitation to the masses for establishing divine laws and rule of the honest people.

2 JCD, Shibir leaders held with arms

COMILLA, Apr 5: Police rounded up 42 people, including two student leaders, and recovered two arms from various parts of the district today, reports UNB.

The arrest was made during a special hunt in suspected hideouts in 12 thanas to recover illegal arms and nab terrorists.

They caught Swapan Dey and Sanaullah from the town with two pipe guns. The arrested also included JCD district unit president Amiruzzaman Amir and organising secretary of Chhatra Shibir Mosharrif Hossain. They were sent to jail.

The Midnight File

Zhirinovskiy presidential candidate

MOSCOW, Apr 5: Extreme-right nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy registered today as a candidate in June presidential elections, the Interfax news agency reported. Zhirinovskiy, 49, became the third official candidate for the June 16 poll after President Boris Yeltsin, and communist party boss Gennady Zyuganov, reports AFP.

Iraqi Opposition meet in Damascus

Plan to involve army for ousting Saddam

DAMASCUS, Apr 5: Iraqi opposition groups have decided to intensify joint efforts to overthrow President Saddam Hussein and enlist the pivotal involvement of the Iraqi military, a statement said today reports AP.

Ending a two-day meeting in Damascus, the 10 groups stressed the need for a national Iraqi project uniting the opposition in a joint effort to end Saddam's rule.

Opposition factions in the past have failed to form a united alliance against Saddam because of their traditional rivalries. The statement said those who participated in the meeting "thoroughly discussed the mechanism of introducing radical changes in Iraq by involving the Iraqi army inside the country more effectively in the process of changing."

Next PM should act as chief executive: Hanif

By Staff Correspondent

The next Prime Minister should act as the chief executive of the whole country rather than of a particular political party, Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mohammad Hanif said yesterday.

He was speaking at a dinner for the journalists hosted by him at his official residence in the city. The Mayor thanked the journalists for their sincere projection of the national scenario including the political development in the city.

Whoever is elected to form the next government... the office of the premier should be kept above any party affiliation and it must reflect the aspirations of 12-crore people of the country," Hanif said.

Extending whole-hearted cooperation for the arms recovery drive the Mayor said "As long as the armed hoodlums would be allowed to go scot-free no one can ensure free and fair polls in the country."

The Mayor also touched a non-violent sit-in programme from Janata Mancha on March 23 which continued till the end of BNP rule on March 30.

One barred from boarding flight at ZIA

By Staff Correspondent

One person was prevented from boarding an international flight at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) last night for allegedly carrying one lakh US dollar, according to airport sources.

The person who identified himself as a businessman was reportedly stopped by the security personnel at the airport at around 9:30 pm. It was learnt that the currency was found in his bag. However, customs official could not give any details of the incident till late last night.

Dacoity in Cox's Bazar

From Our Correspondent

COX'S BAZAR, Apr 5: Three dacoits looted gold ornaments, cash and valuables worth about Tk two lakh from a residence here this afternoon after stabbing a housewife.

Seriously injured Razia Begum, 35, wife of Advocate Kabir Ahmed of Cox's Bazar, was admitted to the district Sadar Hospital.

The gang of three armed men entered the house near the Burmese Market at around 1 pm. They tied up two children and stabbed Razia while asking for the keys of the almshouse, family sources said. The dacoits decamped with 20 tolas of gold ornaments, Tk 40,000 and other valuables.

The mayor urged the government officials to remove the photo of Begum Zia from offices.

The mayor alleged that some BNP terrorists have threatened government officials not to remove Begum Zia's photograph. However, he assured all cooperation against any threat and help to the administration to maintain neutrality.

Earlier, Abdus Samad Azad demanded, judicial enquiry against 'corrupt' ministers, MPs and some family members of Begum Zia.

He also demanded announcement of the election schedule to hold election within 90 days under a new Chief Election Commissioner.

monitor the developments as regards the three parties. The sources added that the issue of alliance with Dr Kamal Hossain's Gana Forum and some Islamic parties was also discussed.

An influential BNP leader, when asked on electoral alliance, said they might even approach the left parties for the purpose.

Another BNP leader said they would soon contact the like-minded parties to discuss electoral alliance, formally or informally.

It may be recalled that Jamaat had supported BNP in forming government after the 1991 general elections.

FCO report

From Page 1

Dhaka-9 and Dhaka-11 constituencies. In their report, they pointed out that due to volatile security situation, their activities were largely restricted.

The ticking off of names on the voter register was at times done carelessly, leaving potential for ambiguity about who had voted, the report said adding that inadequate provision was made for voting secrecy. Citing one instance, the report said that voters cast their votes in full view of officials and other voters.

About the claims that 20 per cent voters' ID cards had been issued mainly in the urban areas, the observers expressed their surprise and said that they did not see any voter presenting an ID card.

Access to stations for the elderly and infirm was difficult at some stations as the polling booths were on the second and third floor, the report added.

But given the circumstances under which this election was held the Election Commission and its staff are to be congratulated on holding an election at all, the observers said.