

DOWN TO EARTH

Present Milieu in Dhaka City

By ASM Nurunnabi

The present milieu in Dhaka city has reached such a stage as to give rise to the question whether it is really a city. According to an ADB-funded survey of urban poverty conducted by the Dhaka University lately, in Dhaka more than six persons out of ten do not live under a regular roof, do not use tap water and do not have access to anything even remotely resembling a lavatory. In this situation, the question is inevitable: by what name we may call these settlements of congested and deprived humanity.

A city postulates a higher level of organisation that provides a higher level of amenities of life sustained on the basis of a higher level of norms and values. Are all these elements present in the existing state of things in the city? We seem to be destined to wait a long time to find a positive answer.

There is no end to the litany of present woes of city life. The city dwellers tend to feel that safety of their lives and security of their property are something they have long handed over to fate. Though the city may have a cosmetic face and an impressive skyline in its affluent parts, more than half of its population live in shanties and slums. Our daily existence is bedeviled by these nightmarish factors: there is no space to stretch the limbs, no clean air to breathe, even no leg-space on the roads, lanes and by-lanes. Modern transportation is a shambles, compounded by traffic jams all over the city.

But the most recent sufferings of the city dwellers is the twin problems of load shedding and scarcity of water. These days we find that an entire system of roads has been turned into inaccessible territory through the various public works in progress no one questions the necessity of activities geared to improvements in the quality of civic life. But what one finds galling is the exasperatingly slow pace at which such works are done.

In the opinion of observers, the standing of the city Mayor today as the elected leader is far higher than in normal times. Accordingly this is his chance to show us how effective a city father can really be. In the changed situation, the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakha (RAJUK) has also better opportunities for going ahead with its plans for a better city life: especially in the housing sector, so that the continuous heavy pressure of population on the city may be eased somewhat.

The RAJUK is understood to have in hand five projects for relieving the housing problem of the city. Of these, the biggest one is called the Purbachal or Yusufganj project. The projected is due to come up eight to ten kilometres east of the Zia International Airport. It will extend over about seven thousand acres of land. For this project, situated at the junction of Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur districts, it is understood that 6150 acres of land have already been acquired. This project will provide for well-planned houses, roads,

lakes, parks, playing fields, schools, colleges, markets and shopping complex. To the citizens of Dhaka, beset with numerous problems, the projected township may appear as a dreamland. The present change in the top echelons of government provides a good opportunity to RAJUK to give a big push to those prized project.

A recent seminar on Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan emphasised the need for coordination between agencies responsible for implementing the city development plans. Obviously Dhaka's growth from a mere provincial town to a mega city in a little more than two decades has put immense pressure on all kinds of its physical facilities. If the overstretching of city amenities on account of this fast growth has been a key factor for poor services in a number of areas, it is felt that lack of planning and coordination between different agencies have only compound the situation.

Some suggest that the Caretaker Government may take a serious look into the affairs of our capital city particularly relating to horrendous traffic jams, clearing of roads of mass encroachments and removing hitches as far as possible in regular supply of electricity and water.

If the metropolis is allowed to grow further without effective plans for tackling its manifold problems, this city which is projected to rank among the 10 most populous in the world, may end up as an unmanageable, oversized slum.



Early season lychees were being sold for Tk 50 per 100 at a city market yesterday. — Star photo

Cong-I admits, it can't dislodge communists ruling West Bengal

CALCUTTA, May 3: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) Party admitted today that it was in no position to dislodge the state of West Bengal since 1977, reports AFP.

Somen Mitra, the party's state president, said the Congress could only hope to slightly improve its tally in the 294-member West Bengal assembly.

"We have a good prospect of increasing our seats," Mitra said as tens of thousands of people voted Thursday across 140 state assembly constituencies in the state of 67 million people.

Voters also cast their ballots to pick 20 of the state's 42 representatives in the federal parliament.

The second and final round of polling in West Bengal is due on May 7.

Mitra's colleagues in the faction-ridden West Bengal

Congress also ruled out a victory against the ruling Left Front.

West Bengal, which borders Bangladesh, has been ruled by a 10-party coalition headed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) since June 1977. The front has won three successive elections with thumping majority.

Salien Das Gupta, the state CIP (M) Secretary, said his party would retain power. "We do not have any problems in returning to power," he said. "The people are solidly with us."

Election officials in this state capital reported enthusiastic polling on Thursday. Men and women, particularly in villages where the CPI (M) considers its domain, were seen in long queues at polling stations, officials said.

The CPI (M), founded in 1964, is the country's dominant communist party. It also rules the small northeastern

state of Tripura and is expected to storm to power in the southern state of Kerala.

Meanwhile, India's Election Commission today ordered a re-poll in 123 voting stations across six states where balloting in the second round of national elections was marred by violence and alleged rigging.

Deputy Election Commissioner Subhas Pani said the fresh polling would be held Saturday and Sunday. The stations are spread across 38 federal constituencies in the southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the northern states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the central state of Madhya Pradesh and the eastern state of West Bengal.

There have been several complaints about poll-violence, rigging, intimidation and fraud in the current elections. The second round of balloting Thursday was marred by violence which left nine dead in the eastern state of Bihar.

The Midnight File

Liberian faction leaders barred from entering US

WASHINGTON, May 3: The State Department announced today it was barring Liberian faction leaders, their families and associates from entering the United States. "This action results from the refusal of the faction leaders to heed the pleas of the Liberian people and the international community to stop the wanton fighting and killing and corruption and looting in Monrovia," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said, reports AFP.

53 countries for ban on anti-personnel mines

GENEVA, May 3: Fifty-three nations today agreed to restrict the use of anti-personnel mines worldwide, but human rights groups were already bitterly attacking the deal for legitimising a vicious weapon, reports AFP.

The package submitted to the conference has now been accepted, said Johan Molander, Swedish chairman of the 53-nation UN conference called to revise a 1980 UN convention on "excessively injurious" conventional weapons.

However, he admitted the results were modest given the scale of the problem.

The announcement came after Pakistan lifted its objections. The compromise agreement was to be formally adopted later today. Handicap International said the accord had failed to curb the spread of mines and had betrayed the hopes of thousands of mine victims across the globe.

The compromise deal was hammered out after two weeks of intense negotiation, with Pakistan — at loggerheads with India over Kashmir, Pakistan complained a "mine import/export ban could infringe its right to self-defence."

Islamabad, which feared a mine export ban would set a precedent applicable for other types of weapons, secured the insertion of a paragraph into a political declaration that accords the right to self-defence and non-interference in domestic affairs.

The phrase said "that noth-

ing in the amended protocol shall be invoked as affecting the purpose and principles contained in the United Nations charter."

The accord reduces the threat posed by mines, making them easier to detect and giving them a "built-in self-destruct mechanism" which would render them useless 120 days after they are laid.

However, while it restricts the use and transfer of anti-personnel mines, the agreement does not ban them outright. Non-governmental groups accused negotiators of having given into pressures from the military lobby.

Handicap, which groups some 450 non-governmental organisations, was scathing about the proposed accord, the fruit of two years of discussions.

"If the conference intended to find solutions to the inexorable growth in the number of (mine) victims, mainly among non-combatants, the result is a betrayal of the hopes and expectations of all those who have to face this threat on a daily basis," said Handicap.

GF: Forge unity

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impartial elections "free from arms, terrorism and influence of black money," the meeting noted.

Meanwhile, the Gono Forum Parliamentary Board has set the last date on May 7 for receiving applications seeking party nomination for contesting in the coming parliamentary elections.

Interviews of candidates from Rajshahi, Khulna and Barisal divisions will be held on May 8 and those belonging to Sylhet, Chittagong and Dhaka divisions on May 9.

Party tickets

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from Chittagong division first. The interview process will continue till May 6.

Candidates seeking to contest the polls on Jatiya Party tickets can collect application forms till tomorrow and the JP parliamentary board will start taking interviews from May 6, according to party sources.

On the third and final day for submission of forms yesterday, 278 forms were sold from the AL central office and 616 were submitted.

Some 30 forms were collected on behalf of party chief Sheikh Hasina, noted Jallil. But he could not confirm how many of those forms were finally submitted.

Party sources, however, said that Sheikh Hasina may seek party nomination from four seats — Gopalganj-3 (Tungipara-Kotalipara), her home constituency; Begur-6 (Pirganj) the home district of Dr Wazed Mian, her husband; Bagerhat-1 (Fakirhat-Moharhat-Chitalmar) and Dhaka-10 (Tejgaon-Ramna).

Five application forms seeking BNP nomination were collected for party chief Begum Khaleda Zia.

The Jamaat-e-Islami's parliamentary board would finalise party nominations in all 300 constituencies of the Jatiya Sangsad by May 6.

Ten more join

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mondi residence to formally join the party while the other five trade union leaders and Saver Pourashava Chairman joined AL at a function held in front of the party's central office yesterday afternoon with AL general secretary Zillur Rahman in the chair, said a press release.

Welcoming the newcomers at her residence, AL chief Sheikh Hasina said Awami League wanted to build up a corruption-free and terrorism-free country and to ensure people's economic upliftment.

Fourteen eminent persons joined the AL on Thursday, including former vice-president Justice Abdul Islam, former chief of army staff Lt Gen (retd) Mohammad Nooruddin Khan and former chief of air force Air Vice Marshal (retd) A K Khandaker.

SAARC

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fore being put to the next SAARC summit scheduled for early 1997, he said.

The SAARC convention on terrorism provides for summary extradition of people wanted in terrorist cases when appropriate and trials of alleged offenders in the country where they are found.

India and Pakistan, which have fought two wars over disputed Kashmir since independence from Britain in 1947, are both part of the SAARC initiative, despite trading charges of arming insurgents in each other's countries.

AL polls campaign

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Ershad with a narrow margin of 325 votes. More than our application form from each of the six divisions has been collected in the name of the party chief.

Probable AL candidates in the eight constituencies in Dhaka city are Habibur Rahman Mollah in Demra-Sabujbagh (Dhaka-4); Rahmatullah, a newcomer in the party in Gulshan-Cantonment-Uttara (Dhaka-5); Saber Hussain Chowdhury in Motiheel-Sabujbagh (Dhaka-6); Fazlul Karim in Sutrapur-Kotwali (Dhaka-7); Anwar Hussain, a businessman, in Lalbagh (Dhaka-8); Maktub Hussain in Dhanmondi-Mohammadpur (Dhaka-9); Dr H B M Iqbal in Tejgaon-Ramna (Dhaka-10) and Kamal Mazumder in Mirpur-Palabi (Dhaka-11).

However, grassroots level leaders and workers in the capital want Sheikh Hasina to contest from at least one seat in Dhaka — either Sutrapur-Kotwali (Dhaka-7) or Tejgaon-Ramna (Dhaka-10), said the sources.

Meanwhile many central leaders of the party returned to the capital yesterday after performing the Eid-ul-Azha with the people of their respective constituencies.

Awami League scored 29.33 per cent votes by getting 88 of the 300 directly elected seats in the parliament in the 1991 election. Besides, some other candidates, using the AL election symbol boat also bagged a few more seats.

In comparison to its national average, the AL did well

in Dhaka division (30 per cent with 27 seats out of 90), Khulna division (43.24 per cent with 16 seats out of 37), Barisal division (47.82 per cent with 11 seats out of 23) and Sylhet division (36.84 per cent with 7 seats out of 19) while it rated poor in Chittagong division (20.33 per cent with 12 seats out of 59) and Rajshahi division (20.80 per cent with 15 seats out of 72).

However, AL did bad results in greater Dhaka district by bagging only two seats out of 35. Greater Dhaka consists of six district — Dhaka, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Gazipur, Narayanganj and Narshingdi.

The AL's trauma in Dhaka city was reversed with the big victory of Mohammad Hamid, city AL president, in the Mayor election in 1993.

Tremor

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this year, following quakes in southwestern Yunnan and in northwestern Xinjiang. The magnitude 7 Yunnan quake, which hit Feb 3, killed at least 304 people and left 3,775 people seriously injured. The magnitude 6.9 quake that struck March 19 in Xinjiang, a much less densely populated area, killed 24 people and injured 40.

Israel delays partial pullout from Hebron

JERUSALEM, May 3: Israel today delayed its partial withdrawal from the flashpoint town of Hebron until after the May 29 general elections, drawing swift accusations from the Palestinians of breaking the peace accords, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who is also the defence minister, made the decision after meeting with military chiefs in Tel Aviv, sources close to the Israeli leader said.

But until the redeployment goes ahead the army will continue to withdraw equipment from the West Bank town and could make a symbolic gesture to the Palestinians by evacuating some posts, they added.

Peres, who said after the meeting he was in no hurry to fix a date for the partial pull-out which is already more than a month behind schedule, published a statement saying it would be coordinated with the Palestinians.

The vagueness of the statement left the Prime Minister

with some scope for manoeuvre.

But Yasser Arafat's Palestinian authority angrily denounced the new delay. "Israel is going back to its old habits of breaking the accords and not fulfilling its commitments," said Hassan Asfur, the head of the authority's negotiations department.

"This certainly won't help the peace process," he added, accusing Peres of "following the opinion of the right-wing extremists in Israel and the Jewish settlers."

Military chiefs warned Peres of the increased risk of anti-Israeli attacks during the election period by both settlers and Palestinians opposed to the deals struck between Israel and the PLO to launch Palestinian self-rule.

The withdrawal of Israeli troops from most of the town had been due to take place in March but was postponed after a spate of Islamic militant suicide bombings in Israel killed around 60 people.

Taliban rocket Kabul: 3 killed

ISLAMABAD, May 3: Rockets slammed into Kabul overnight and today, killing three civilians and wounding nine, government-controlled Kabul Radio reported, says Reuters.

The radio, monitored in Islamabad, said the rockets had been fired by the Islamic Taliban militia besieging the Afghan capital since October. It said several homes had been damaged.

Taliban leaders could not be reached for comment.

Rocket and artillery barrages on Kabul have occurred almost daily for several months as forces loyal to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani fight off their Taliban foes.

Kabul Radio reported on Thursday that three civilians had been killed and 14 wounded in rocket attacks in the previous 24 hours.

Baltic leaders meet in Sweden

VISBY, Sweden, May 3: The heads of government of the Baltic sea states meet for the first time today and Saturday in Sweden in a bid to add political vigour to their recent cooperation in the region, reports AFP.

The 11 leaders arrived separately today at midday on the island of Gotland, 90 kilometres (55 miles) off of southern Sweden, where Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson will open the summit at 2:45 PM (1245 GMT).

Two work sessions are planned, this afternoon and Saturday morning, at a hotel in the Visby Port, after which a joint political declaration will be presented.

Chandraswami

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around his neck, long hair, a vermilion dot on his forehead and dresses in simple robes and sandals. But the austerity ends there.

The 46-year-old spiritual adviser to many politicians lives in New Delhi in a 3-story fortress-like compound of pink granite, drives luxury cars and jets around world mediate huge business deals, most of them for arms and ammunition.

Chandraswami claims thousands of followers in the United States, a country he often visits. His claims of friendships of celebrities, including Elizabeth Taylor, the Sultan of Brunei and several top international arms dealers.

India's parliamentary members routinely seek his blessings at his ashram, a 40-room palatial house in New Delhi with 24-hour police protection.

The Central Bureau of Investigation, the equivalent of the American FBI, has questioned Chandraswami several times in the past year, but didn't take any action against him.

"It is no longer a secret that Chandraswami continues to enjoy the confidence of Prime Minister (PV Narasimha Rao)," said The Statesman newspaper. "The godman is one of the few allowed direct access to the prime minister's residence in his own car."

Chandraswami is facing charges in more than a dozen cases, including giving refuge to a wanted criminal.

Last week, Chandraswami was fined for violating currency regulations when he accepted 6,000 British pounds (4,000 dollars) from a former international arms dealer.

Freedom of press

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any media is likewise affirmed," Karatnycky said.

Twenty nations received the worst rating for press freedom: Afghanistan, Algeria, Burma, Burundi, China, Cuba, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Libya, Nigeria, Serbia-Montenegro, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates and Zaire.

Algeria was found to be the most dangerous country in the world for journalists. At least 26 editors and reporters were killed by Muslim extremists.

Five of the countries without freedom of the press are formal democracies, the Central African Republic, Albania, Georgia, Moldova and Turkey, according to the survey.

A partly free press exists in 65 countries, including 44 that have democratic systems of government, the survey said. Among them: India, Argentina, Colombia, Haiti, Philippines and Russia.

Sixty-four countries have a press free from all types of political interference, the survey determined.

The survey said that the Internet holds a great deal of promise for improving the free flow of information on a global scale.

The Internet may yet provide an insurmountable obstacle for censors of every nationality," said Leonard Sussman, who coordinated the survey.

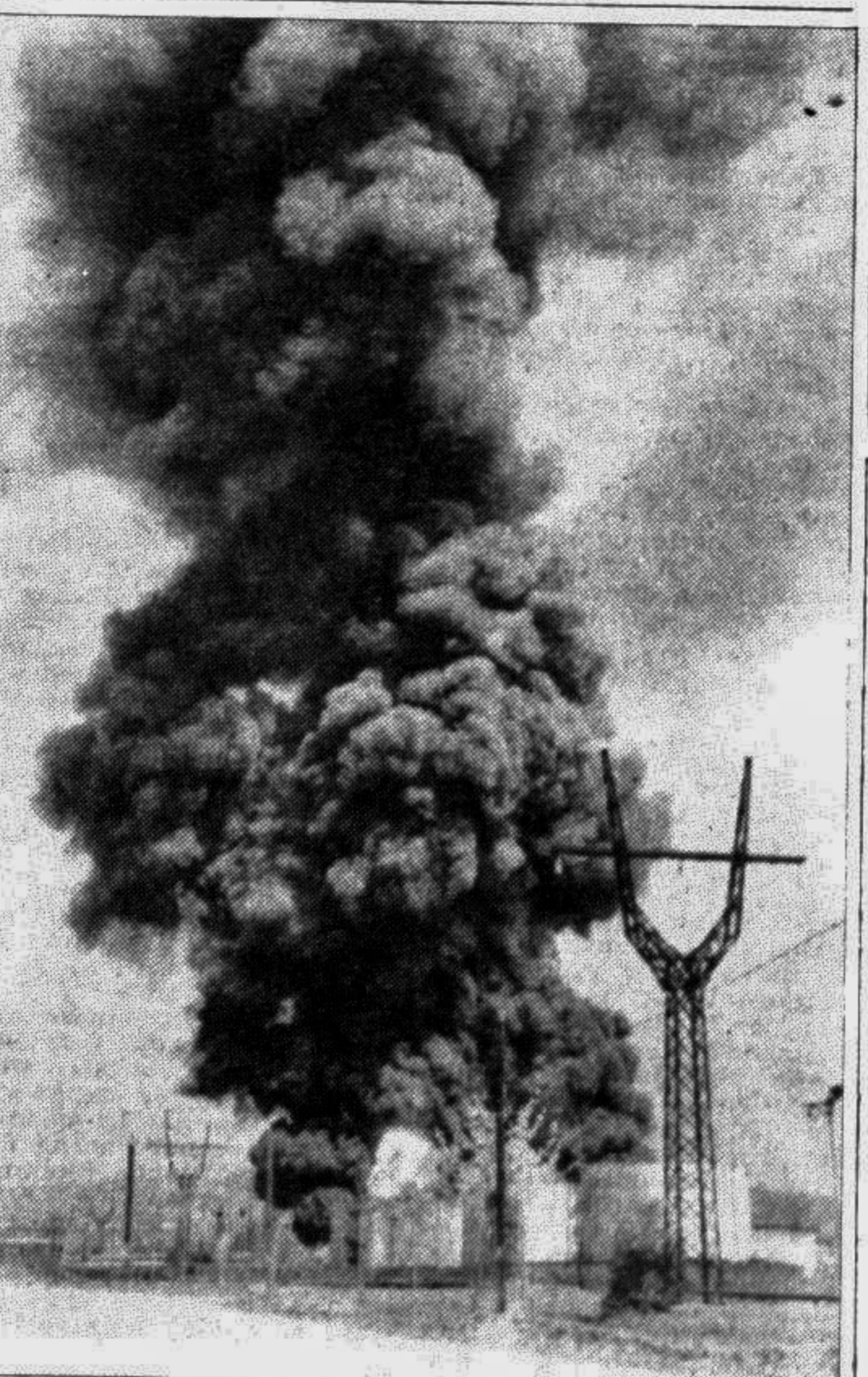
Thailand backs Myanmar's entry into ASEAN

BANGKOK, May 3: Thailand supports the admission of Myanmar to the ASEAN Regional Forum, an informal security grouping of 19 nations, a foreign ministry official said today, reports AP.

The official, who asked not to be named, confirmed published remarks by Foreign Minister Kasem S Kasemsri in which he said Myanmar should be allowed to join without any conditions.

The forum was founded two years ago by the seven members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations — Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The ASEAN Regional Forum is set to meet next in Indonesia in July. The host country is preparing a set of criteria for membership. India is also under consideration for membership.



A thick black plume of smoke rises from two 5,000 tonne oil storage tanks at a refinery plant in Grozny May 2 after being attacked by Chechen fighters. — AFP photo

Serbs won't allow extradition of leaders

SARAJEVO, May 3: Bosnian Serbs are willing to cooperate with war crimes investigations by the UN tribunal, but will not allow the extradition of their leaders, the speaker of parliament says, reports AP.

Both men, Radovan Karadzic and Gen Ratko Mladic, have been indicted for war crimes and genocide by the tribunal, based in the Hague, Netherlands. Neither is in custody.

Asked if the two would be extradited, Momcilo Krajisnik, a senior Karadzic aide, said yesterday that his government will cooperate "only according to our constitution, which stipulates that our citizens can be tried only by our courts."

Krajisnik was speaking with the British Broadcasting Corp.'s Serbian-language service.

Rajko Kasagic, a more moderate Bosnian Serb official, told reporters today in Pale, south of Sarajevo, that extradition "contradicts our constitution."

European Union

7 join BNP

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the nationalist forces to rally round BNP for making a better Bangladesh to face the challenges of the coming century.

Describing the forthcoming general elections as the most crucial one, the BNP chairperson said that it would decide whether Bangladesh will go ahead or go backward, whether Bangladesh would become an emerging tiger or become a bottomless basket, whether the people of Bangladesh would be successful in protecting their fundamental rights of work and livelihood or again become the hapless victims of famine and economic ruin.

She said that the BNP is a modern political party imbued with modern thoughts and vision for the 21st century.

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