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Down to Earth

Hopes for Improved Transport System

By A S M Nurunnabi

In the gloom of the present lacklustre city's transport scenario, some silver linings may be noted. It was a welcome piece of news that the government has already decided to recast the city's transport system in the light of the needs of the people. The government is set to initiate a 121.7 million US dollar Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) to improve the city's communication network with funding from the World Bank. The project has both a short-term and a long-term objectives.

At the moment, we are more interested in the short-term objectives which seek to streamline the mass transport facilities with particular emphasis on increasing the number of private sector buses. We should keep in view that by the turn of the century, Dhaka will become a megacity when the transport system will have to handle a far greater number of commuters.

When the present disarray in our transport system is somewhat different in nature because of the overwhelming presence of rickshaws, other Asian cities like Bangkok, Manila, Hong Kong are also facing tremendous congestion problems which they are trying to grapple in their individual ways. In order to ease traffic congestion in Dhaka, which is going from bad to worse as the number of both commuters and the vehicles on city roads is increasing day by day, the government has lately issued directives to draw up a plan on priority basis to construct ring roads and circular railways to

lessen the pressure. In many big cities in the world, ring roads have been constructed to accommodate the large number of heavy vehicles like lorries and buses.

The traffic situation in the city may improve when a ring road is constructed around it only because there will be fewer vehicles on the main thoroughfares. Introduction of circular trains will enable the commuters to enjoy greater mobility in comfort from one place to another. Moreover, there is also urgency to implement the long-pending proposal for introducing more double-deckers which can comfortably carry 100 passengers at a time. The policy adopted by the BRTC since 1993 for leasing out double-deckers, at present 47 in number, to the private sector which is reported to have been working well, may be considered for expansion with the proposed induction of 200 double-deckers. All these factors will help in easing the chronic problem of traffic congestion.

A project preparatory mission of the World Bank that visited Dhaka last year made observation, among other things, that rickshaws have been a major factor discouraging private bus operators to invest in premium services in city routes. Besides, low or no-profit in a dictated tariff environment is identified as a principal cause for the absence of quality transport in Dhaka city. The mission recommended a pilot scheme for some premium service bus routes — such as Uttra-Farm Gate-Shahbagh-Motijheel, Mirpur Section 10 to

Motijheel via Bijoy Swarani-Uttra-Mahakali-Maghbazar, Gabtoli-New Market-Shahbagh-Motijheel. The premium bus service in the private sector from Uttra to Motijheel via Farm Gate and Shahbagh has already been in operation since December last is a welcome beginning, although the limited number of such AC coaches operating on this route coupled with the non-queue habit of the waiting passengers at the specified bus stops create some obstacles, especially for the ladies and elderly people. Anyway, operation of the premium bus service is just a drop in the ocean of overwhelming transport needs of fair standard for most of the commuters. As such, opening of other premium routes as proposed with a sense of urgency is a crying need.

While the absence of regular taxi service is one of the drawbacks of a modern city's transport system, we find no dearth of advertisements all over the city to attract rent-a-car business. Most of the time of the day, we find long rows of such transports, particularly on the northern side of the North-South Road beside the Bangladesh Secretariat, and on the Panthapath Road waiting for the passengers. However, it is felt that if such transports could be operated as taxis with metres, they may easily attract those who turn to autorickshaws.

The bottom line is that all these factors may play a helpful role in mitigating the suffering of the city's commuters by improving its transport system.



Mother Teresa (R) and sister Nirmala greet people at the Missionaries of Charity headquarters in Calcutta yesterday. Sister Nirmala was elected to replace Mother Teresa on Thursday, but the 86-year-old Mother Teresa said retirement was out of the question despite handing over the reins to her 63-year-old successor.

— AFP/UNB photo

Delhi's direct rule in UP extended

NEW DELHI, Mar 14: Hindu nationalists suffered a rebuff today when the Indian parliament voted to extend New Delhi's direct rule over the most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, reports AFP.

Angry members of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) walked out of the Lok Sabha, the lower house, shortly before a vote on the controversial subject.

"We cannot be a party to such an action," BJP veteran Jaswant Singh said. "It is politically dishonest, constitutionally suspect and unwise."

But the treasury benches and other parties in the Lok Sabha approved the motion, put to vote by Speaker PA Sangma, extending New Delhi's direct rule over Uttar Pradesh by another six months.

The motion will now go to the upper house, the Rajya Sabha, and later to President Shankar Dayal Sharma for approval. However a motion passed by the lower house is rarely turned down by the upper house or the President.

Uttar Pradesh, a sprawling northern state of 140 million people, was put under federal rule in October after elections

left a hung legislature, as no one party had enough seats to form a government.

Federal rule was to expire on April 17, and the BJP, India's main opposition party, has been pressing New Delhi not to extend it and instead give it the chance of forming a government.

The BJP had topped the Uttar Pradesh ballot as the single largest party, although it failed to win an outright majority and the rival mainstream parties refused to help it form a coalition.

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Racketeer held in city

A racketeer was caught red-handed from a housing company at Mirpur Section-1 in Dhaka yesterday, police said, reports UNB.

The racketeer identified himself as Mamunur Rashid. He was handed over to police by some officials of the housing society, Basati Property Development Ltd.

The managing director of the housing society, Makbul Ahmed, received a phone-call at 8 am from a person who identified himself as a deputy tax commissioner. The caller directed Makbul to hand over two bags of rice and some cash to his representative named Mamun.

Accordingly, Mamun reached the spot at 10 am, met the managing director and requested him to hand over the said amount of rice and money.

At one stage, Mamun admitted that he and the phone-caller are the members of an organized group involved in racketeering in the city. Later, he was handed over to Mirpur police.

Doctor murder

From Page 1
their involvement in the killing, police added.

Dr Hafizur Rahman was gunned down allegedly in front of his residence at Sanatangar in Zigmatola under Dhanmondi thana on March 1.

Eight policemen of Hazaribagh police outpost under Dhanmondi thana were suspended earlier for their alleged negligence to duty after the killing incident.

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