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TO INDIA

Down to Earth

Proliferation of Shops

By A S M Nurunnabi

The burgeoning growth of shops in the city is a notable aspect of metropolitan life. While in the cities and towns of developed countries, it is not easy to find a shopping centre close to the residential areas, it is quite different in Dhaka. It will not be an exaggeration if it is said that everyday new shops are being opened along lanes, bylanes, streets and boulevards in the metropolis. Here one will find a shop not far from one's drawing room. Big shopping complexes are being raised wherever an open space is available along the roadside, irrespective of any consideration whether the place is at all suitable for commercial activity. As a result, the city of nearly nine million people is now virtually littered with shops of various descriptions, besides the steady growth of large shopping complexes.

The rising trend of setting up shops does not spare the once quiet and select residential areas like Dhanmondi and Gulshan. The big shopping complexes at important points of the city are a constant source of traffic jams. Of course there are underground parking spaces in some of the important shopping complexes, but they make little difference to the ever growing traffic congestion at most of such places.

Although there are indications that the purchasing power of the people has not grown by a significant degree, the number of shop keeps growing. Why? According to observers, people don't have much option. Situation in job market is thought to be bad. Industry is considered risky and it requires more than only money. So people open up a shop when they have some

savings, thinking that it is the safest and least hazardous among businesses.

There is still the question whether the unbridled growth of shops help the economy in anyway. It is of course true that the manufacturers of indigenous products are benefitting from the increasing number of outlets. But there is the sombre picture that shopping complexes are encouraging unnecessary imports. In some cases smuggling adds to the woes of the economy.

In this context, it may be noted that under the policy of open economy, a wide variety of consumer goods are being imported into our country. All this helps to make the shops, be they located in middle-class or posh areas, well stocked with imported products. For examples, perfumes and toiletries from the well-known brands of Europe, France and America, cheese from France, juice from Australia and marmalades and corn flakes from England are easily available in most of such shops. Of course, on account of their better quality, prices are rather high. But there are many affluent customers in our society who can easily afford them and the indigenous products which are comparatively of lower quality get a beating in competition with them.

Though, according to the version of the Dhaka City Corporation, they had permitted 20,000 shops and 92 markets till the end of 1996, this does not seem to reflect the reality. The unofficial figures will be much higher than that. Add to this the mini kacha bazars (not shopping centres) selling meat, beef and vegetables, which thrive near government offices

and foot paths which have been given green light lately by the City Corporation and we get a vast picture of the retailing business being operated in the city. Many of such non-formal trading spots can be seen in such crowded localities as the Motijheel Commercial Area, and on the Mirpur Road between Dhanmondi and Mohammadpur, and many other congested localities in Dhaka city.

In this connection, it is felt that many of the scheduled shopping centres and markets could not come up in the residential areas as officially allocated in the approved blueprints, due to alleged misuse of power and influence by the top and affluent minority of the society. As a result, we find a strange mixture of various of non-commercial uses of lands within the earlier earmarked residential areas. Left to the market forces, the development of the shopping facilities starts at the top where there is more surplus money to spend for non-essential items.

Economists wonder whether the mushroom growth of shops in Dhaka does have any rationale linked to the strength of the Bangladesh economy. From the economic indicators, they find that the growth in the manufacturing sector has not been bright and that the purchasing power of the people has not much improved.

In the heyday of their imperial glory, the British people were called a nation of shopkeepers by their detractors. We are left to wonder whether in the light of the present trend of growth of shops in the metropolitan area, we may be similarly labelled.

Environment Court to be constituted

Minister for Environment and Forests Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury yesterday said the government has decided to constitute an environmental court to try the persons responsible for polluting the environment, report agencies.

She was inaugurating a seminar on "Dhaka city's endangering environment: Our role" jointly organised by Institute for Environment and Development and East West University and Centre for Urban Studies.

Presided over by environment institute chairman AMA Muhi, the seminar was also addressed by city Mayor Mohammad Hanif and Secretary of Youth Ministry ASM Shahjahan.

The minister said the government would amend the existing environmental laws making it stricter.

Referring to the environmental hazards caused by different development activities, the minister said there is no alternative to sustainable development, but the environment should be protected through co-ordinated efforts.

Stressing the need for the contribution of all sections of society to check environmental pollution, she said, "It is not possible for the government alone to maintain better environment."

Shi'ite lawyer shot dead in Lahore

LAHORE, June 6: A prominent Shi'ite Muslim lawyer, Ghulam Mustafa Naqvi, was gunned down today as he drove his motorcycle down a congested street in this ancient Punjab capital, police said, reports AP.

A motorcycle roared up beside Naqvi and the passenger opened fire with an automatic rifle, according to eyewitnesses.

No one has claimed responsibility for the killing but Pakistan's Punjab province has been wracked by bloody religiously motivated violence in recent months.

As many as 100 people have died in battles between militant Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims.

Most of Pakistan's 140 million people are Sunni Muslims who get along with their Shi'ite brethren. But militant groups of both sects have sprung up in recent years and they often clash.

The Punjab provincial government has set up a special task force to try to root out religious killings. And some lawmakers have openly discussed banning religious parties in Pakistan.

Villager shot dead in Cox's Bazar

COX'S BAZAR, June 6: A villager was shot dead and 10 others injured in a gunfire at Ukhiya thana of the district today, reports UNB.

An armed gang, known as 'Syed Bahini', set ablaze a house in Paglirbel village in Ukhiya and then took shelter at a nearby house sensing the presence of police.

The miscreants opened fire soon after police gheraoed the house. Abdus Sukur, 30, a villager, was killed during the firing.

Of the injured, Ali Hossain was admitted to hospital with bullet injury.

Meanwhile, police arrested two of the terrorists - Rafique, 35 and Kamal, 17. A case was filed with Ukhiya police.

4 Bihar ministers sacked

PATNA, June 6: The Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav today sacked four dissident members of his cabinet hours after they attended a meeting of his rival, candidate for Janata Dal presidential election, Sharad Yadav here, reports PTI.

The four ministers are Ram Lal, Mangini Lal Mandal, Ram Jivan Singh and Bijendra Prasad Yadav.

They, along with another minister Pasupati Kumar Paras, attended the meeting of Sharad Yadav, Paras, who is the younger brother of Railway Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, was, however, spared the sack.

The Chief Minister told PTI that the four had been dropped for "anti-party" activity and attempts to 'damage' the government.

Govt opens border for Indian goods: Ershad

THAKURGAON, June 6: Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad has warned the government that his party would announce a 'jihad' if the weekly holiday on Friday is shifted to Sunday, reports UNB.

Addressing a public rally at the local Eidgah ground today, he also criticised the government for what he said, opening the borders for Indian goods.

"With many other goods, the market is flooded with Indian sugar. A deep-rooted conspiracy is on to sell out the country's sugar mills," said Ershad.

The JP Chairman demanded of the government to fix the price of rice at Tk 280 per maund. The government buying rate in the district is now Tk 140.

About the dissident JP leaders Kazi Jafar Ahmed and Shah Moazzem Hossain, he said: It is no loss for a mountain if two pebbles drop from it.

Ershad described his "painful experience in prison" during the BNP regime and said JP could not come to power in 1991 as the then caretaker President had sent him to jail violating his commitment.

About the steps taken by the government to reduce pollution, the minister said the government vehicles have started using gas (CNG) instead of petrol and diesel as fuel.

More double-decker buses would be introduced in the city by reducing two stroke engine vehicles phase by phase, she added. The government is also studying the feasibility of circular train in the capital.

Sajeda Chowdhury said over population, traffic jam, excess vehicles, uncontrolled slums, deforestation, disruption of Pagla WASA treatment plant, liquid effluent of Hazaribagh tanneries and water-logging have made the city environment severely polluted.

The Environment Minister regretted that most of the factories and industries have no drainage device to remove wastage which pollute air, soil and water alarmingly.

Consumption of power on holidays

By Staff Correspondent

The requirement for power on Saturday last, the second day of the two day weekly holiday, was 25 MW more than that on Friday last.

According to sources in the Power Development Board (PDB) the requirement for power on Friday last was recorded at 1950 MW and for Saturday, it was 1975 MW. Generation of power on these two days was around 1850 MW each.

The sources said that the requirement for power is usually about 2050 MW while the generation is around 1915 MW.

French Open

Sergi, Gustavo reach final

PARIS, June 6: Sergi Bruguera, former two-time champion, beat Patrick Rafter and Gustavo Kuerten, an unseeded Brazilian, defeated qualifier Filip Dewulf to advance Friday to the final of the French Open, reports AP.

Kuerten, ranked No 66 in the world, became the first Brazilian man to reach the finals of a Grand Slam tournament by defeating Dewulf 6-1, 3-6, 6-1, 7-6.

Bruguera, at No 16 the only seeded player who made the semifinals, beat Rafter 6-7, 6-1, 7-5, 7-6.

'United efforts a must to combat drug abuse'

Home Minister Rafiqul Islam has said the government will take all measures to combat abuse of drugs that is severely affecting the society, particularly a section of youth community in the country, reports UNB.

"Government, non-government organisations and citizens will have to fight unitedly to remove the menace of drug abuse from the society," he said, assuring that the government would take strict actions to break the drug rings in the country.

Addressing a seminar on "Prevention of Drug Abuse" at the Osmani Hall in the morning, the home minister said abuse of drugs is not only a national problem, but also an international one.

The government will identify the roots of drug-trafficking to block those and take steps to stop drug abuse with a view to building drug-free society for the future generation, he added.

Bangladesh Anti-drug Federation of NGOs (BAF-NGOs), organised the seminar attended by international leaders of anti-drug organisations and the local anti-drug working groups. State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed, President of International Federations for NGOs (IFNGO) Dr Putera Astaman and Honorary Secretary of IFNGO Malaysia Data Haji Mustapha Ma also addressed the seminar.

The BAF-NGOs Advisory Council Chairman and IFNGO Vice President, journalist Iqbal

Sobhan Chowdhury, presided. The home minister said creating public awareness against addiction will be helpful to combat drug abuse. The media can play a vital role to create such public awareness, he added.

He said the government is going to amend the existing anti-drug laws to make those suitable for facing the present day problems.

"But we will not be able to go forward by introducing laws only if the society is not aware of the adverse effects of drug abuse and do not take united steps against it," the minister observed.

About the treatment of addicts, he said the government is thinking of setting up at least one specialised hospital at divisional headquarters to expand services to them.

IFNGO president Dr Putera Astaman said drug trafficking has become the second largest illicit business of the world and the whole world should be united to stop abuse of drug to save millions of lives.

Prevention could be made by educating people about the severe adverse effects of drug abuse, he said adding that media, religion and home system should be used for educating people about the bad effects of drug.

In his presidential address, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury said abuse of drug is a man-made disaster. A social war is needed to fight the menace and make the country free from drug abuse, he added.

BISTEC launched

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third world making interdependence in the face of competitiveness.

He described this event as "the first-ever joining of hands of a member of ASEAN with three SAARC members through formation of a growth quadrangle which opens a new chapter of economic cooperation in this part of the world with a great deal of ramifications."

He said with ASEAN having agreed to establish the ASEAN free trade area (AFTA) by the year 2003 and SAARC pursuing the same goal to attain by the same time, we visualise that the cooperation will pave a massive way between South and South-east Asia through trade liberalisation and lowering of trade barriers.

He said growth triangles or quadrangles are seen as a dynamic growth mechanism that can accelerate the process of economic transformation and integration of component regions.

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PHILIPS



BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia at a discussion organised by Zia-Khaleda Research Council at the Jatiya Press Club auditorium yesterday, marking the 16th anniversary of Zia's death. —Star photo

Plan to set up EPZ in Bogra

BOGRA, June 6: The government is planning to set up an export processing zone in the district and has asked the local administration to select a site for it, reports UNB.

Sources said the district administration has recently held a meeting with the local businessmen, industrialists and political leaders to discuss the issues.

The meeting was learnt to have proposed a site at Chhonka, alongside the Bogra-Sirajganj road for the planned EPZ.

President of Bogra Chamber of Commerce and Industry Taheruddin Chowdhury hoped that the EPZ would be set up in near future as all the preconditions needed for a viable EPZ are there.

He said many new industries have been set up in the district during the last few years and machinery parts made in the district are now being exported.

Writ challenging Cong presidential election

LUCKNOW, June 6: A writ petition challenging the Congress presidential polls and seeking its postponement was filed in the Allahabad High Court today, reports PTI.

The vacation judge of the Lucknow bench of the High Court, BK Singh, issued notice to the Election Commission, the All India Congress Committee and the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee on the petition filed by Vimal Mehrotra and three other Congress workers from Kanpur.

The petition which prayed for postponing the Congress presidential polls till the completion of other organisational elections including that of UPCC, will be heard and disposed of on Monday.

The petitioners alleged irregularities during the conduct of the elections.

They alleged that RK Dhanwan was illegally declared an AICC member from Kanpur.

Sharif

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India and improve the relationship.

He said there was a serious problem of visa between the two countries which, he believed, would be sorted out soon. There are long queues of visa seekers outside the high commissions of both the countries and then people are subjected to police reporting, Sharif said adding, "I think there is no need for all this... it's nowhere else in the world. We want to simplify the procedure."

The Pakistan Prime Minister was of the view that the harassment and the bashing of the diplomats in both the countries must be stopped immediately. "We must get out of the hangovers of past animosity."

"If something goes wrong in India, they blame Pakistan and if any bomb blast occurs here, we blame India. This has been our approach for the last 50 years."

"I want to come out of this frame of mind for a new beginning," he said.

New Delhi accuses Pakistan of arming and training Muslim guerrillas spearheading a bloody separatist campaign in the Indian zone of Kashmir.

Islamabad denies the allegations but describes the drive as the Kashmiris' legitimate struggle for self-determination.

More than 20,000 people have died in the separatist violence in Indian-administered Kashmir. Islamabad accuses Indian troops of large-scale human rights violations in the troubled region.

In the interview, Sharif said he would like to visit India.

I want to go to India to watch cricket matches and I want Gauraj to come here to watch one-dayers, he said.

'AL provoked govt employees during BNP regime'

Speakers at a seminar in Dhaka yesterday underlined the need for a people-oriented administration to integrate the officials and employees in nation-building activities, reports UNB.

The seminar on "Administrative Officials and the BNP Government" was organised by Zia-Khaleda Research Council (ZRC) at the Jatiya Press Club.

The participants contended that only the BNP regimes had successfully involved government servants in development activities, ensured transparency and made the administration accountable.

They said the BNP governments of late President Ziaur Rahman and Begum Khaleda

DUS employee held with revolver

An employee of the Dhaka University Snacks (DUS) was arrested with arms from the fast food shop at TSC on the campus yesterday, reports UNB. Police, while on duty, raided the DUS area and nabbed Swapna, 18, a DUS employee, along with a country-made revolver. A case was filed with Ramna police.

Bodos demand separate state

GUWAHATI, June 6: The Bodoland State Movement Council (BSMC) today demanded a separate Bodoland state as the Assam government was "deliberately" avoiding a solution to the Bodoland problem for "narrow political gains."

The centre can always grant a separate state for the Bodos, as was promised by the former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, in case of 'Uttarakhand', the BSMC chairman, S K Biswimithy, told PTI over phone from Kokrajhar.

Referring to handling of Bodo problem by the Assam government, he said "there is no point" in calling meeting to solve the Bodo issues when the political will was not there.

Biswimithy said the centre should hold immediate tripartite talks to solve the Bodo issues as the law and order situation might further worsen in the Bodo dominated areas.

The Bodo leader demanded a judicial enquiry into the alleged rape of some Bodo girls in two villages under Tamulpur police station by army personnel recently.

Vit-A Week

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will help to eradicate night blindness from the country. The week is a part of the long-term programme aimed at eradicating night blindness of children by the year 2000 and reducing malnutrition, said Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf.

World Health Organisation (WHO) considers night blindness that occurs due to deficiency of Vitamin-A as a public health problem in if exceeds 1 per cent. In Bangladesh, the percentage is now 1.1.

However, the night blindness among the children in the country is on the decline as the result of a Vitamin-A capsule feeding programme launched in 1973 under the sponsorship of UNICEF.

The night blindness among the country's children was 3.76 per cent in 1981-82 and 1.76 per cent in 1989.

Sect staff

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The employees reportedly welcomed the proposals but stuck to their demand for restoration of the previous office timing and immediate announcement of the pay commission award with effect from July.

Blast kills 7 bus passengers in India

PATHANKOT, June 6: A bomb exploded in a passenger bus in northern Punjab state today, killing seven of the passengers and wounding 20 others, police and witnesses said, reports AP.

The incident came on the 13th anniversary of the army raid on the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion, to flush out Sikh militants engaged in an armed revolt for independence.

The explosion occurred 10 minutes after the bus left the city of Pathankot northward for Jammu. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion. Pathankot is 400 kilometers (250 miles) north of New Delhi.

The bus had hardly traveled 800 meters (yards) from the bus station when the explosion occurred," said Gaurav Yadav, the senior superintendent of police.

Sweden Aslam

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filed with Tejgaon, Kotwali and Mirpur thanas.

Police said Aslam had a well organised network in Dhaka metropolitan area, Savar, Keraniganj and in Chittagong city. Twelve accomplices of Aslam have been arrested so far from different parts of the city and its suburb.

6 killed

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han overturned at Jaigirhat when it tried to overtake a bus. Three of the dead were identified as Nayama, 30, Shari-fuddin, 32 and Kalimuddin, 35. The two others could not be identified till filing of this report last night.

In Sirajganj, an unidentified young man was killed and 25 people were injured in a bus-truck collision on the Bogra-Nagarbari highway at Kundail in Raiganj thana, according to UNB.

The young man, aged about 30, died on the spot when the Sirajganj-bound bus from Chandaikona and the Bogra-bound truck from Nagarbari collided head-on at about 10 am.

Of the injured, four were admitted to Bogra Mohammad Ali Hospital while 10 others to Raiganj Hospital.

Police seized both the vehicles, but their drivers and helpers were absconding.

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