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## Down to Earth

### Problems of city's river port

By A S M Nurunnabi

Dhaka's river port, popularly known as Sadarghat, on river Buriganga serves as an important link in the inland river port network. It is an old river port. The growth of Dhaka city with its trade and commerce based in Sadarghat, Chowkbazar, Badamtoli and adjoining areas has centred round this river port. In fact, the history of old Dhaka in some respects is associated with it. Its location suffers from one serious drawback: access to it is encumbered by a heavily congested area in its immediate neighbourhood. This naturally tells upon easy movement of goods and passengers.

The river port handles a heavy volume of passenger traffic each way. The passenger volume increases manifold on the occasions of major festivals. Launches of private owners mainly operate from this launch ghat. Big size steamers of the BIWTA operating on long-distance routes also pass through this launch ghat from their terminal at Badamtoli.

As one approaches the terminal, the dirty and filthy aspects of the surrounding area appear overpowering. The high traffic congestion in the area contributes mostly to this state of affairs.

The first feeling of unpleasantness that a passenger with some luggage experiences arises from his encounter with the porters. The prevailing situation is reported to be as aweful as most passengers are found to fall victims to 'tyrant' porters and unruly hawkers besides the continuous traffic jam just outside the terminal

building. There are also the unauthorised construction of hotels at the pontoons which make matters worse. There are prescribed rates of portage, but in most cases they are not followed. Allegations of the porters' forcible collection of portage much higher than the fixed rates from the passengers abound. The porters are said to be so much organised that they compel the passengers to pay even 10 times higher than the fixed rates. The porters reportedly do not allow the passengers to carry their own luggages. The passengers generally avoid disputes over portage rates for fear of manhandling by the porters. It was also reported that a system of 'contractors' operates at the launch ghat under which the so-called contractors take the lion's share of the collection made by the porters from the passengers.

Hawkers reportedly occupy almost two-thirds of the pontoons causing serious hindrance to the movement of the passengers at the peak hours of launch traffic movements from 6 pm to 8 pm. The hawkers are said to be backed by a group of musclemen who collect regular tolls from them. On account of the backing by the musclemen, it was found difficult to evict the hawkers.

Sources close to the private launch owners mentioned a number of difficulties in the proper functioning of the launch ghat. First, considering the high volume of passenger traffic and the large number of launches using this ghat, the existing number of pontoons and

gangways were said to be inadequate, with the result that there is constant pressure on the available facilities causing tremendous congestion. It was also reported that there is no adequate provision of berths for waiting launches, which poses a threat to them particularly in times of storms.

It was pointed out that frequent overloading of passengers and goods has been a factor for causing accidents and loss of life. Sources close to the private launch owners said that the launch operators have now been more vigilant in this respect resulting in greater control of such overloading. At present supply of drinking water is not available, on launches for passengers except those in upper classes. The launch operators put stress on this requirement.

The river port has its own importance, because it serves as a river outlet in the heart of the capital. It, however, seems that with the future growth of the city, the question of further expansion of this river port may not be an easy one because of the heavy congestion in the neighbouring areas. The river Buriganga may also pose problems in the operation of the river port, particularly in the lean season in view of the ever-growing volume of river craft on its narrow expanse.

According to most observers, the gloomy aspect of the Sadarghat launch terminal is that it is held hostage by a circle of musclemen causing unbounded harassment to the numerous passengers who are without proper relief in sight.

### BDR takes steps to prevent influx of Rohingyas

COX'S BAZAR, June 27: Bangladesh Rifles have taken measures in the border points to prevent influx of Rohingyas into Bangladesh, reports BSS.

BDR sources said about one thousand illegal Rohingya intruders were sent back to their homes in Myanmar during this month through different border points.

Deputy Commissioner Ali Imam told BSS that about 400 Rohingya refugees who crossed into Bangladesh territory illegally were sent back to their homes on Wednesday through Naikhangchhari, Ukhaia and Teknaf border points.

The influx of Rohingya refugees has slightly increased during the last 15 days, he said.

Additional Commissioner of Refugee, Relief and Repatriation said at present, some 21,812 refugees are awaiting repatriation at two camps in Ukhaia and Teknaf.

229,065 refugees had been repatriated to their homes in Myanmar till April 30 last.

About 7,000 more refugees have got clearance for repatriation, but Myanmar government is showing unwillingness to take them back on the plea that the last date of the repatriation process expires on April 30 last, the sources said, adding that the issue is expected to be discussed at the official level talks between the two countries at Yangon next month.

### No election under AL govt if bypolls rigged: Ershad

Jatiya Party Chairman and former president, Hussein Muhammad Ershad yesterday urged the electors to vote for party candidate Mohammad Ramjan Ali in the by-election for Manikganj-3 constituency, reports BSS.

He was addressing a series of election meetings in the constituency.

The JP chief said his party will not contest any polls in future under the government if rigging and corruption take place in the by-election. He urged the leaders and activists of his party to guard against all possible irregularities.

### Rival groups of JP claim majority support

By Staff Correspondent

Contradictory statements claiming the confidence of overwhelming majority of Jatiya Party office bearers at district level have been made by rival groups of the party.

A joint statement by the presidents and secretaries of the 70 district committees, denouncing the council session called by the 'rebels', was issued from JP central office at Kalabagan in the city yesterday. The joint statement issued on behalf of 121 district level leaders was signed by Azad Sultan, Joint Office Secretary of the party.

Two senior presidium members of JP — Kazi Zafar Ahmed and Shah Moazzem Hossain — who had earlier challenged the leadership of H M Ershad in the party, has called the council session on June 30.

"We enjoy the confidence of the rank and file in all the 72 organisational districts," Kazi Zafar claimed, talking to The Daily Star last night.

According to him, they were expecting attendance of 7000 councillors and 5000 delegates from across the country.

Secretary General of the party and Minister for Communication Anwar Hossain Monju, when contacted told this correspondent, "The top notchers of the party do not consider that the party has split." He however, did not elaborate.

### Khmer selling

From page 1

"Investigations revealed that Khmer Rouge guerillas are selling arms to the northeast-based insurgent outfits," he said.

Yadav, who is on a visit to the northeastern states this week, did not elaborate.

Dozens of separatist groups in the northeast region are fighting for independent homelands.

### Wheat worth Tk 2 lakh seized

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, June 27: Police seized ten metric tons of wheat worth Tk 2 lakh and arrested two persons from a trawler in Betagi thana area of Patuakhali district early today.

According to police, one Yunus Mia, a wheat dealer of Mirjaganj thana of Patuakhali, sent this wheat to Jhalakathi to sell it off illegally late last night.

### Japanese loan

From page 1

will connect the Southwest and the Northwest areas of the country by road and mitigate transportation bottlenecks between the two areas.

As for the Narayanganj-Narsingdi area, Japan has to date provided grant and implemented field studies for its development.

The loan, to be provided this fiscal year, is meant for engineering service for the construction of a flood control embankment surrounding undeveloped A-2, A-3 blocks and area B (24,000 hectare) of the area and for equipping irrigation and draining facilities in block A-2 (16,200 ha).

Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Dr AKM Masihur Rahman and Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Yoshikazu Kaneko signed the agreement on behalf of their respective governments.

After signing the agreement, they hoped that the existing friendly relation between Bangladesh and Japan would be further strengthened in future.

With the signing of this exchange of note, total commitment of Japanese loan assistance to Bangladesh since independence stands at \$11.50 billion Japanese Yen, equivalent to Tk 14530 crore (334 crore US dollars).

First Secretary Shuichi Sakakibara and Second Secretary Kazumasa Shibuta of the Japanese embassy and senior officials of ERD were present at the signing ceremony.

### palestinians

From page 1

tion of economic blockade by the occupying Israeli authorities.

The Prime Minister mentioned Bangladesh supports a just, durable and comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem and called upon international community to extend all necessary support and assistance to the Palestinian people.

"We reaffirm our unflinching and unreserved support and total commitment for the just cause and the struggle for realisation of the inalienable rights to a separate and independent homeland with Al Quds Al-Sharif as the capital of the Palestinian people," she said.

Hasina expressed the hope that good sense will prevail upon the Israeli authorities and stalled peace negotiation will restart soon that will lead to the realisation of the overall objective of a just, durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

### SKOP strike

From page 1

grammes in mills and factories. The SKOP's detailed programmes will be announced at a press conference today.

Its demands include fixing Tk 3,000 as national minimum wages, stopping privatisation, protection of national industries and ensuring trade union rights in EPZs.

The countrywide strike of the SKOP will be the first since Awami League assumed power on June 12, 1996. Ruling party's labour front Jatiya Sramik League is also a component of SKOP.

### PCJSS fronts split

From page 1

Shantu Larma in his headquarters across the frontier. But Shantu, reportedly incensed with Sanchoy's recent stand, declined to meet him.

On June 13 after his botched attempt to meet the supreme, a statement by Tanoy Dewan and others blasted him for convening the council meeting of the PCP at Khagrachhari. They declined to attend the council.

The PCP formally split into two factions as Sanchoy and his followers went ahead with their meeting at Narokkhalapara at Khagrachhari.

Mrigantha Ghosh, Tawai Maung Marna and others held a press conference at Chittagong Press Club on June 18 sharply criticising Sanchoy and his mentors, accusing them of ignoring the decision of the April 20 delegates' council at Chittagong to hold the council in Dhaka or Chittagong.

They also accused Sanchoy and others of "trying to stir unrest in CHT in league with the communal forces and unholy groups." They are making efforts to create trouble after the government announced that it was nearing peace with a consensus on all issues.

They also accused them of staging a small gathering in Dhaka on March 10, demanding full autonomy for CHT and engaged in attempts to split the Pahari Gano Parishad and Hill Women Federation, two other front organisations of the PCJSS.

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President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday hosted a dinner for Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena and high civil and military officials. — PID photo

### 'Organised group provoked mob to burn three to death'

An organised group, in a bid to create law and order situation, provoked a mob to burn three alleged childlifters to death at north Badda, police said yesterday.

"In preliminary investigation, we have detected the group which has fled the area. However, one of the arrested is a member of the group," an investigator told UNB.

The police official did not say if the group has any political identity, neither did he disclose the name of the arrested member of the group.

Three unidentified alleged childlifters were burnt to death and one person was shot dead amidst a police-mob battle at north Badda in Gulshan on Wednesday.

The investigator said there were more than 10,000 people during the melee. "But some 100 of them, instigated by the group, actively took part in the violent incident."

### Road accidents

From page 1

Manikganj. The dead were identified as Mujibur Rahman, 36, Muklesur Rahman Bakul, 35, Abdur Rab, 32, Nuruzzaman, 33, and car driver Abdul Malek Tela, 28.

Mujibur Rahman and Muklesur were CBA president and general secretary respectively of the Carew & Co. sugar mills employees union.

All the eight injured were first admitted to the Magura Sadar Hospital. Later, two members of the bridal party — Hasan and Nazrul — were sent to Dhaka for treatment. Police seized the bus and the private car.

BSS adds, three persons, including a woman were killed and seven others injured in a road accident at Laxmipur on Comilla-Chandpur road.

The dead were identified as Abul Kashem, 45, Golam Mostafa, 40, president and vice-president respectively of BCIC Employees Union and Anwara Abedin, 50, elder sister of Abul Kashem.

Police said the accident occurred when the Chandpur bound Pajero Jeep from Dhaka collided head on with a Comilla bound passenger bus. Two injured persons were admitted to Comilla General Hospital while five critically injured shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). They were going to Chandpur to attend a wedding ceremony.

Police seized the bus but the driver fled away.

The bodies were sent to the Comilla General Hospital for autopsy.

### BAPEX

From page 1

December next. The project involves an expenditure of about 30 crore taka.

Sikail is located 20 to 25 km away from the Bakhrabad gas field, now considered a "dying" field.

"If BAPEX finds a big gas reserve in Sikail, it can be easily developed as all necessary equipment for developing a well is available with the Bakhrabad gas field, located only 20 to 25 km away," the source added.

The source further noted, the Bakhrabad field had equipment worth over Tk 100 crore. If the government had not decided to keep Sikail for its own exploration, these equipment would be wasted or inefficiently used when the gas field would be closed.

"The other areas in these blocks remain open for bidding," he added.

The bidding was opened on March 15 and the foreign companies would submit their proposals by July 15. The government has committed to complete all negotiations and sign contracts by December 16 next through a transparent process.

### HK: Handover holiday

From page 1

Kong's free-wheeling money culture — the stock market — was doing its final dealmaking under the British flag.

Trading at midday today was quiet as the market readied for a five-day handover holiday, with its key index still close to its record high. The financial markets will reopen Thursday.

Hong Kong's 60-member legislature, meanwhile, was spending what was supposed to be its last day of lawmaking.

The legislature, which is being dismantled by China and replaced by an unelected body set up by Beijing, has been enacting dozens of eleventh-hour measures, but Hong Kong's incoming government has indicated that at least some will be scrapped.

The session could go into overtime tomorrow if lawmakers can't wrap up business as scheduled on Friday, said spokeswoman Alianna Choy. But on Thursday, the first working day after the handover, the legislature's staff will be back at work — for the new body.

Patten was planning a goodbye "walkabout" in the crowded heart of the Kowloon district.

At one of Hong Kong's most popular temples, devoted to the Taoist god Wong Tai Sin, the outgoing governor and his wife, lavender, planned to release a flock of birds to seek blessings for the people of Hong Kong.

The temple was a fitting venue, since Hong Kong people seek Wong Tai Sin's advice on everything from horse-racing tips and lottery tickets to marriage plans.

Winding down the days to the handover, symbols of colonialism's sunset abounded. The Black Watch, a storied Scottish regiment, marched in khaki and tartan through its last parade.

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### PM visits ailing cabinet secy

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited the ailing cabinet secretary Ataul Haq at the cardiac department of Suhrawardy Hospital in the city yesterday afternoon, reports UNB.

The Prime Minister enquired about the treatment of Haq and asked the attending physicians to take care of him.

After the handover, border controls between Hong Kong and China will remain in effect. Up on the hilly green frontier, all was quiet today.

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### AL team leaves for China

A five-member delegation of Awami League left Dhaka yesterday for China on a good-will visit there at the invitation of China Communist Party, reports UNB.

Amir Hossain Amu is leading the delegation which includes Mohammed Abdul Jalil, Azizur Rahman, Ataur Rahman Khan Kasier and Mohammed Nurul Fazole Bulbul.

Besides, Bangladesh will also have a busy tour schedule in the next two years starting with their New Zealand tour next September.

Early next season, Bangladesh will travel to India and Pakistan to take part in the tournaments with the identical title of Willis Trophy. After that, Bangladesh will tour England in May, 1998 and South Africa in October, 1998.

Replying to a question, Saber informed that WorldTel was paying 50,000 US dollar for sponsoring Bangladesh in the Asia Cup.

Answering another question, Saber said, "One-day international is a temporary status. The ICC has given us an interim period to prove our worth. The monitoring will be done on two considerations — infrastructure and performance. As far as the infrastructural aspects is concerned, the ICC development committee has already given a highly commendatory report in our favour. Now we have to perform and only perform."

When asked whether Bangladesh will have to play the next ICC Trophy or not, Saber said, "This point will not be a problem. Because I am very much optimistic about getting the Test status before the next ICC Trophy."

About the seventh Asia Cup, Saber said that if Bangladesh gets Test status before that then the ACC may increase the number of participants to six from four.

Finally, Saber disclosed that a star Australian cricketer may join Bangladesh for the Willis Trophy a la South African captain Hansie Cronje who played for Ireland in the Natwest Trophy in England this year. It is a part of the ICC development committee programme.

### Restriction

From page 1

Carrying of licensed firearms in the constituency will be restricted for 96 hours from 12 midnight tonight.

Meetings and processions have also been banned in the constituency for 48 hours from midnight tonight, according to another EC press release.

It said setting up of election camps or canvassing within a radius of 400 yards of the polling centres has been restricted on the election day.

The violators will be punished under the relevant law.

### Statements contradictory

From page 1

The Chairman of Petrobangla, talking to this correspondent yesterday, said "Nothing can be said in this regard till the committee submits its report."

A group of geologists from the Dhaka University, who had visited the site following the blow-out, observed that the incident took place due to 'human error'.

It seemed there was some lack of supervision and coordination among the people at the drilling site, they noted.

The government had awarded the contract for exploration at Magurchhara under Kamalganj thana in Moulvibazar district to Occidental in January, 1995. Occidental subcontracted the drilling to a German company, Deutech.

The explosion at the site in the night of June 14 led to a fire and the flame rose upto 600 to 800 feet. The flame is now at a level between three to five feet as the gas pressure has dropped.

The formation pressure at the drilling site was on the rise, according to the log report upto June 14, officials concerned said, adding that there was ample time and opportunity to avert the explosion.

The main factors in any drilling programme are hydraulic pressure and mud weight. The mud weight is adjusted according to formation pressure.

When the pressure was rising the mud weight should have been increased to avert the explosion, the officials observed.

Meanwhile, some more equipment for the Magurchhara drilling site are scheduled to reach Zia International Airport from Dubai today in a chartered plane, according to official sources.

The flight will carry cementing equipment to be used for plugging the holes at the drilling site, after the fire is extinguished.

Earlier, two consignments of fire fighting equipment were flown in from Singapore.

Those equipment were, however, not used as the height of the flame started reducing automatically with the fall of gas pressure.

### Pak rly

From page 1

Pakistan railways currently employs 109,000 people.

The plan divides the railway network into