

Gulshan-Baridhara-Banani Lake Development Project: A Response

by Tanwir Nawaz

RECENTLY I was away from Dhaka, travelling in the USA and Canada. Upon my return in late July I learnt that there was some news in the local news papers about a proposed Lake Beautification Project in Gulshan involving, amongst others, a massive numbers of housing units. This news naturally interested me since I have been involved with housing and urban development for a long time both in Bangladesh and abroad. Within a few days there was further news in the papers about this Gulshan project, significantly, that there was to be investigation about the project and the deal, and later that the government has constituted a team to investigate it.

Thereafter on Sunday, 17 August, last I was very surprised to find a massive two-page coloured advertisement in a number of local newspapers announcing the project in some detail. This was presented as *fait accompli*. My immediate reaction was that how could this have happened without prior public knowledge, disclosure and any consultative process with persons and the public likely to be affected. How was this possible when there was a new Structure Plan (Dhaka Structure Plan 1995-2015, Master Plan, Detail Area Plan) prepared by UNDP/GOB (the ministry of housing and public works (MOHPW)/RAJUK and only recently adopted by the MOHPW without any mention of such a massive project.

In an open and democratic society it is incumbent upon authorities concerned to conduct public affairs in an open and accountable way. Apparently, on this massive proposed development project in the most desirable housing location of the Dhaka City this necessary criteria had not been followed. The consequences therefore could be far reaching and devastating to the urban built environment. The implementation of this clandestinely conceived project should be immediately stopped until general public and civil society who should have many questions which are clearly and openly answered by the authorities who are acting on behalf of the public at large. I take the opportunity to set about below some of the key questions and issues which emerge *ex-facto* from the advertisement.

Land and Land Values

The coloured advertisement made bold statements about improving the environment in and around the Gulshan Lake and the prices paid for land development. Was there an environmental study conducted for this project on the land pro-

posed and its impact on the surrounding environment? How were the land values for the project arrived at? The government and RAJUK owe it to the people to inform them at what actual price the land was sold. It was mentioned in the said advertisement that on an investment of \$ 50 million or Tk 220 crore, the company will have 70 acres of land or 210 bighas for the development of commercial and public utility projects. The bare land cost therefore will be Taka 1 crore and 10 lac per bigha.

Was this the amount that was paid to the public agency, or is it the developer's own assessment of the final price of developing the so called raw land?

What is the current fair open market price of land in Gulshan and Baridhara today? By some development industry estimates current open market rates in Gulshan now vary between Tk 4.00 crore and Tk 6.00 crore per bigha. Since this huge area of land was not leased to an individual allottee but to a developer, why was no fair market price charged to the projects, developers/builders?

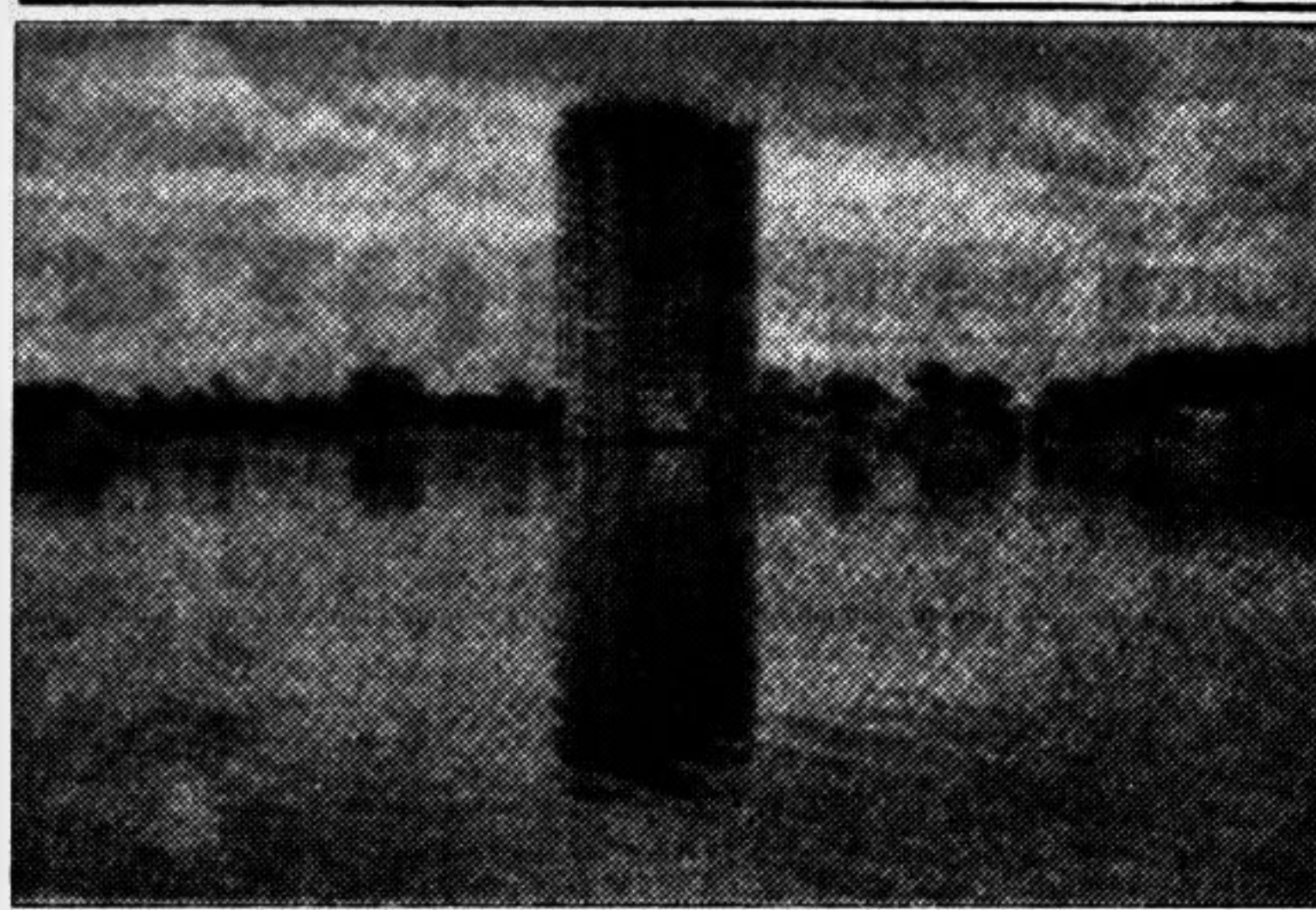
The further question which arises is how was this land allotted to this group and under what process? Who decided on the above price if it is true? How is it also that a particular developer obtained an exclusive right to develop such a lucrative project to the exclusion every other qualified groups or persons?

Since the new developers will get this huge chunk of land from the public agency at less than market rate, they would undoubtedly undercut each and every builder and cause a major upheaval in the construction industry. Why then was there no open or a tendered process for land development or a comprehensive lake beautification design competition open to all qualified developers? The whole process calls for a very close scrutiny.

What is the time scale for start and completion of the project?

Urban Planning and Urban Development

Concurrence with the new DMDP. This new development proposal will certainly change the whole face of Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani and affect every resident living there in major way. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that all aspects of planning and development proposed by the development and its impacts are clearly analysed and understood and a consensus arrived at. The question which also arises is whether this proposal



Present site (left) and the proposed development (right): Building up pressure.

a part of the New DMDP (Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan 1995-2015) prepared and published very recently by RAJUK. It should be examined if this proposed development is a part of the DMDP and conforms to its goals and objectives.

If this proposed development is a part of the new DMDP development plan of the Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani area, there should be clear reference to the plan. I could not find any reference to such major development proposed in the DMDP plan. Instead, the aim and objectives of the DMDP plan are absolutely the reverse. To quote from the new DMDP recently published by RAJUK:

Gulshan lake is under constant pressure to be filled by RAJUK for creating new residential plots. If this is allowed to continue unhindered, it will not only destroy this wonderful open space, but also the essential retention capacity for storm water from a vast area resulting in local flooding and water logging.

Adequate measures are required to prevent further filling and reduction in size of Gulshan Lake, so as to maintain its effective retention function and develop it as a centre of recreation. Gulshan Lake should also be integrated with Begunbari khal and effectively controlled development of Bagunbari khal areas within this zone.

DMDP (Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan 1995-2015, vol. II, Urban Area Plan, pages 54, 55 and 56) published by RAJUK / MOHPW.

Density, Height, Zoning, Parks, Lease holder's right etc. RAJUK/Public access to lake: The plans as presented in the advertisement shows a series of tall buildings (20 storied?) on both sides of Gulshan Lake. It forms a formidable physical

and visual barrier to the current housing to the lake, basically cutting these off from the lake. Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara were never designed for this kind of extremely high density edge housing developments. The cramming of huge numbers of high rise multifamily apartments by filling up large parts of the existing lake constitutes a major densification of the area without disclosing the consequences. The densities and height restrictions will have been lifted without any public study and without consultations with any knowledgeable and affected parties. Was there ever an environmental, socio-economic and physical planning studies conducted for this proposal and were they ever made public prior to striking deals and agreements? Were the residents of Gulshan ever consulted on these matters? This is definitely high handed and authoritarian planning at its peak. This kind of handed down and dictated planning must stop in an open and democratic society. The planning and regulatory authorities should never be allowed to change existing planning rules without major studies and extensive public consultations.

Currently, the Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara areas have a height limitation of 60 ft with six floors maximum allowed. This is a recent development from the original plan. The original plans called for single unit developments on plots varying in sizes from 3500 sq ft in Banani and Baridhara to 14400 sq ft in Gulshan areas. Generally a four storied was the maximum allowed. The densities varied from a low of 3 units per acre to 15 units per acre that is accumulates for 18, 80 per-



Present site (left) and the proposed development (right): Building up pressure.

son per acre. The new current policies of six storied multiple unit developments have effectively increased the densities to 60 units to the acre. In other words, upto 360 persons per acre. We can see that even at an early stage of this potential development what stress this policy change is putting on the neighbourhoods in terms of traffic and utility services (i.e. water supply, sewer and power demands). Think ahead to the time in a few years when we shall have 20 storied development on the lake shore and consequent sure matching demands for further raising the densities and height limitations in the Gulshan, Baridhara and Banani to 20 stories! What will be the effective allowable densities (above 200 units per acre and more?) spread all over Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara i.e. 1200 persons per acre. i.e. 60 times the original plan, and twice the density of 600 person per acre in old Dhaka city at its maximum? The proposed changes has the potential of changing Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara into high class urban slums.

Infrastructure

A. Cars and traffic: To start on a major project like this there should have been a comprehensive study of traffic generation, since the traffic for all the new housing structures will

have to be served through the existing Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani neighbourhood roads. A tremendous number of cars and other traffic will be generated in the area by the new development as well as from the changed zoning of the existing neighbourhoods as discussed earlier. Are the existing neighbourhood roads capable of handling this excess volume of traffic and added street parking? What provision is there for on site parking in this project? Was there ever such a study done? If so, was this study made public for open debate and discussion and neighbourhood input? Without proper comprehensive studies and open public forum debates and consultations it would be a great folly to allow such development on this account only.

B. Utility services, Water supply, Sewerage, Power etc:

It is well understood that when Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara were planned, these were developed with certain maximum densities and load handling capacities. As a result of the proposed development not only will there be more cars and traffic on existing neighbourhood roads but also a far greater demand on the utility services such as water, sewerage, storm drainage, power supply etc. The increase in utility demand in Gulshan, Banani is far from complete. The demand cycle on

the existing services is just starting. The six-storey cycle of development in Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara is currently less than at 20% stage. When all land owners sell the land to the developers the demand on the existing services could be in excess of five times (500%) of current levels.

To this, the authorities decided to add some 1500 or so new apartments on the lake shore. To that there would be surely demands for raising the height and densities of the existing land as per precedence set by the proposed development. What would be the new projected demand on utility site services? Assuming that the new developers are made to pay for the on site service development costs of the new project, who would then pay for the increase in site services costs as a result of changed density in the existing area? There should definitely be a site services demand study before any new development is sanctioned. It would be a folly of great magnitude otherwise.

Policy

Public Consultation and Accounting: As a policy any major land development that may affect existing land owners, inhabitants and the surrounding environment should be discussed in the open. Otherwise, there could be suspicion of cover-up deals between public and neighbourhood inhabitants must be as matter of policy properly consulted and inputs recorded.

I have had the privilege, during the last 30 years as an architect, urban designer, project planner and developer, to observe and be involved in some major housing and urban development projects in Bangladesh and Canada. During 1972, I was engaged in the Physical Planning and Housing sector in the Bangladesh Planning Commission. Later during the late nineteen seventies and the early eighties I was involved as Project Manager for the City of Toronto, Canada in the development of its St. Lawrence Neighbourhood (4500 housing units in downtown Toronto) and the Frankel Lambert Neighbourhood (950 units in mid town Toronto). Yet later I was involved as Project Direc-

tor in the private market development of a major multi-storied development project involving some 900 housing units, 375,000 sq. ft of office space and 2200 cars in underground parking structures. Both city multiple housing projects, and the private sector developments went through extensive studies on planning including densities, heights, traffic, environment, infrastructure demands and a process of open public consultations. No project was agreed upon until a public consensus was arrived at.

The current proposal for the Gulshan Indus Valley project is grossly deficient on a number of essential and key accounts:

1) It is intrinsically a technically flawed project which will have far reaching and serious consequences on the urban environment of Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara.

2) The objectives of the proposal are at total variance with the new Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan 1995-2015 recently released by RAJUK.

3) The proposal lacks accountability and supporting studies in the public domain.

It is true that Bangladesh should welcome foreign investments, particularly in the urban development and infrastructure. But since they are in the public domain, we must make sure that they are for the greater public good and do not aggravate the environment or destabilize the evolving free market structure.

It should also be remembered that the rise in density and increase in congestion will certainly lead to massive drop in the land prices. The land owners who have profited or are hoping for profit could soon rue the day this development is allowed to go through. As a gesture of goodwill to the developers it might be prudent to invite them to build something on the outskirts of Dhaka where complete ground breaking can take place and will not tax the existing environment and infrastructure.

The author is a practising architect and urbanist. He is registered in Canada and Bangladesh and is currently the chief executive officer of an urban development company in Dhaka.

Janmastami: Celebration for the Eternal

by Ekram Kabir

*"Jada jadahi dharmasya glanirbhavati Bharat
Abhuthanandhrmasya tadatmanasrjamayaham.
Paritranaya sadhunam cha dushkritam.
Dharmasantiyapantaya sambhavadityugalyuganti."*
—[Gita: 4/7,8]

EVERY "oracular" birth takes place in a calamitous situation, because, according to the scriptures, every celestial infant was sent to this mortal world by God whenever human beings dipped in anachanism, non-humanism, pursued such acts as contrary to the heavens, forgetting the godly merit in them. So was the birth of Lord Krishna, in a hostile environment marked by impending death. The Hindu scripture says that God Himself appeared on this Earth — incarnation — with a body of a human — Sri Krishna — for the salvation of mankind, mostly those who were sinners, who needed guidance as far as existing on Earth was concerned. In this respect, arrival of Lord Krishna was a point of cyclic breakthrough in the sphere of human existence.

Whether God really came among the humans has been wondered, studied, debated and explained and interpreted endlessly scientists, social scientists, anthropologists, followers and practitioners of religion for ages. Many found it illogical, many never believed it and are still sceptical, while others were and are of the belief that God Vishnu in the form of Sri Krishna was among the temporals. For them, religion is all about "faith" accompanying "metaphysical", "divine" and "spiritual" states of human soul. Without faith, it would seem simply non-existence.

God Vishnu was incarnated under the influence of Rohini star as Sri Krishna on the eighth night of the month Bhadra to the couple — Basudev and

Daibaki — imprisoned by Kansa, a king who maligned humanity and insulted divinity. It was in the dark fortnight of Bhadra; and he was the eighth son of Daibaki. Before Krishna's birth, a series of killing was committed by Kansa after hearing the divine revelation that he was predestined to be exterminated by Krishna for all the transgressions he was responsible for.

Daibaki was Kansa's sister, one of the seven sisters who were daughters of King Devaki. At the time of her marriage with Basudev, son of Sur Sen who came from Jadu clan, Kansa was so overjoyed that he himself joined the 'rath yatra' and at one point began to drive the chariot of the newly-weds. At that moment, a celestial voice told him that his fate was at the hand of the eighth son, the Godsent, of his sister Daibaki. Hearing this Kansa wanted to kill Daibaki right at that moment. But Basudev begged for his wife's life, promising that he would hand all his wards over to Kansa. Convinced with Basudev's truthfulness, Kansa let her sister live. But after the birth of their first son, Kansa brought both his sister and brother-in-law as captives in his prison. But all his endeavours to save himself went in vain, because he was too "proud" to believe in

providence, unwilling to yield to the "prescribed" way of life.

So God was incarnated to banish the 'bad' and instal the 'good'.

Now a bunch of queries may dwell on the ordinary mind: who were Basudev and Daibaki? who was Kansa? why was Krishna born as the 'eighth' son in the dark fortnight of Bhadra? what is Rohini star? what was Yamuna? where was Nandala? who was Yashoda? and so on and so forth.

Well all this to the philosophical enlightened mind is a set-up to preserve the shape of things that is the virtues and the vices to the ordinary mind. Provisionally, it is said that God has two dimensions — "expressed" and "unexpressed". Reincarnation or earthly appearance is the gradation of God from the "unexpressed" state to the "expressed". And, according to believers, God has expressed "Himself" or through his representatives over the ages since the creation of human beings, what is bad and what is good for them.

Janmastami, the birthday of Lord Krishna, is celebrated by the Hindus all over the world in several symbolic ways. This is a day of days for them.

Basu means life and Daiba is heavenly strength — and if these two are made to be complied through worship, says an

interpretation, then revelation of earthly appearance of God is possible.

Lord Krishna was born in Kansa's 'prison'. Kansa is the emblem of 'desire', mostly carnal; and the human body is the abode of thousands of such desires. This abode of Kansa is situated in Mathura of which he is the master. Mathura is derived from 'math' a metal that incites carnal desires in mortals. And Kansa has two wives: 'Asti' (what one has) and 'Prapti' (what one wants to have). Incarnation of God on Earth releases the soul from the desire-dominated and disturbed body for heavenly peace. Thus was the extinction of Kansa at the hands of Lord Krishna, who was born in the month of Bhadra (blessing). And this blessing was meant to be for all mankind.

One aspect of Janmastami seems most significant: Sri Krishna was born under influence of the star Rohini which derives from "Ruhi" meaning "originate". To originate is creation, and as far as the religion is concerned, "creation" is vital for the followers.

The above interpretation is very concise, but according to Hindu scholars, it is not that Bhaagawan Sri Krishna was born only once; instead in the psyche of the worshippers, he keeps alighting again and again, and will be disembarking for ages to come whenever erosion of moral values on Earth will continue unabated. And for this very reason, to the believers, Janmastami is a celebration for the Eternal.

Tom and Jerry



IAN FLEMING'S James Bond



BACK-GROUND AND FULL NAME, PLEASE!

Escargot Roundups



DRAWN BY JOHN McLUSKY

Hartal denounced

By Staff Correspondent

Some social organisations yesterday denounced the hartal saying that there was no rationality for such a programme to reduce the prices of petroleum production which was used by the well off section of the society.

Bangladesh Juba Unnayan Parishad, Nari Mukti Andolan, Bangladesh Ganatantrik Nari Andolan and Tofazzal Hossain Manik Mia Parishad in separate statements said that hartal was the political tool to fight for establishing people's rights.

They observed that the price of diesel — which directly affects the mass people of the country — did not go up by any significant level.

Hartal is not meant for a smaller section of the society alone, said Juba Unnayan Parishad ASM Mostafa Kamal, Nari Mukti Andolan President and General Secretary Sultana Razia and Jahanara Begum respectively. Nari Andolan President Nahid Roksana and Manik Mia Parishad Acting President Adv M Sajawar Hossain.

Nat'l workshop on plant biodiversity begins tomorrow

A four-day national workshop on plant genetic resources (plant biodiversity) will begin in the city tomorrow, reports UNB.

Agriculture and Food Minister Motia Chowdhury will inaugurate the workshop at 9 am at the auditorium of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC).

About sixty plant genetic resources experts from home and abroad are expected to participate in the workshop.

Bangladesh scouts pre-youth forum concludes

Bangladesh Scouts organised a two-day long "Pre-Youth Forum" at the National Scout Training Centre, Mouchak, Gazipur, Aug 22 to 23.

On the concluding day on Saturday Mohammed Nasim, Minister for Post and Telecommunications, Housing and Public Works distributed certificates among the participants as chief guest. National Commissioner and President of Rover Moot Organising Committee Md Zainul Abedin was present as special guest.



Painting show by Japanese artist

By Staff Correspondent

A week-long solo painting exhibition by Sanae Watanabe of Japan, titled "Memory of Dhaka", will begin at 4 pm today, at the Zainul Gallery of the Institute of Fine Arts, DU, says a press release.

Some 25 paintings in mixed media will be on display at the show, which will remain open from 10 am to 7 pm till Aug 31.

Meeting of JS special committee held

A meeting of the special committee relating to scrutiny of bills of parliament was held yesterday at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. President of the committee Mohammad Rahmat Ali was in the chair. A Jatiya Sangsad press release said, reports BSS.

UFOs or US secret airplanes?

By Govinda Shil

'Alien' spaceships, which some people believed came from other planets, are no longer Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs).

They were US secret airplanes, according to a recent Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report. The US Airforce flew them. They could fly as high as 24,000 metres above the earth at a speed of more than 3,500 km per hour.

These special airplanes gathered information for the CIA. Instruments on board the planes took pictures from that distance, according to a Voice of America (VOA) Special English show, broadcast on Wednesday at 15:30 GMT (9:30 Bangladesh Time). The show was re-broadcast at 18:30 GMT.

The VOA said the planes took off from secret bases in California and Nevada, USA. It said there were other bases in Britain, West Germany and Taiwan.

The CIA report said US people had been two types of airplanes — U-2s and SR-71s. The SR-71 still hold the world's speed record that was set in 1976. It flew at a speed of 3,528 km an hour.

Some critics said the CIA report had been released much too late. They said the public needed to know the truth a long

time ago. But the people, who believe there had been visitors from space, do not buy the CIA explanation.

They say the report is another government attempt to keep the truth from the public. National Security officials said it was necessary to keep the planes secret in order to protect a very important national security project.

Khaleda concedes death of BNP leader

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has expressed profound shock at the death of former Dhaka city BNP general secretary Saidur Rahman Sayeed, says UNB.

Sayed, who took part in the BNP's torch procession Saturday evening, died of heart attack after he returned home from the procession.

In a condolence message from Islamabad yesterday, Begum Zia said, "We have lost a dedicated and a committed leader at the death of Sayeed."



Meritorious students of DCC ward nos 68, 69 and 70, who passed SSC exams this year, were accorded a reception by Dhaka Youth Foundation at Nazira Bazar Girls High School premises on Saturday.

Japanese grant for 3 projects

The Japanese government will provide grant assistance for balancing and rehabilitation of Dhaka Centre of Bangladesh Television project, reports UNB.

The Japanese government will also give grant assistance for strengthening the country's storm warning system and observing the national vaccination day 1997 to eradicate the polio disease.

Agreements and exchange of notes for the three projects would be signed between the Bangladesh and Japanese governments on Wednesday.



A civic reception was accorded by the Nagorik Kalyan Sagstha, Dhaka to the president of Naya Palatan Jame-Mosque, M Motiur Rahman, at Orchard Plaza, Naya Palatan on Friday. Mohammad Faruq and Mesbahuddin Zangi, president and general secretary of the organisation, presented a crest and gifts to Rahman.