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## Down to Earth

# Prospects for Improvement in City's Transport System

By A S M Nurunnabi

Lately there have been some indications that the quarters concerned with the city's transport infrastructure are in earnest in effecting improvements, though still limited in scope, in the city's transport system. This all seems to be to the good, since the city dwellers have long been suffering from the city's gross inadequacies and extremely worn-out state of the public transports.

The sporadic and insignificant attempts that have so far made did very little to bring about any real change in the progressively deteriorating situation. It is now hoped that whatever limited changes that have lately taken place or promised to be in the offing for raising the standard of the city's transport service are considered welcome in the context of the city's transport problems.

The government is due to initiate a 121.7 million US dollar Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) to improve the city's communication network with funds from World Bank. At present, the project aims, among other objectives, at streamlining the mass transport facilities with particular emphasis on increasing the number of private sector buses.

The World Bank has made observations that rickshaw-plagued traffic on city roads has been the major factor discouraging bus operators to invest in premium services on city routes. Low or no profit in a dictated tariff environment has been identified as another major factor behind the absence of quality bus transport in the city. On this account perhaps, the government lately relaxed control on tariff structure for buses offering premium services. In this context, a project preparatory mission of the World Bank recommended a pilot scheme for some premium service bus routes — such as Uttara-Farm Gate-Shahbagh-Motijheel; Mirpur Section 10 to Motijheel via Bejoy Swarni; Uttara-Mahakhal-Maghbar; Gabtoli-New Market-Shahbagh-Motijheel. One of the recommended routes, namely Uttara to Motijheel has already been in operation since December last. If the other suggested routes could be opened even in phases gradually, it could have proved of great help to commuters living in other parts of

the city. Accordingly other commuters are eagerly looking forward to the opening of the other suggested premium service bus routes. Another welcome development is the recent introduction of a smaller type passenger vehicle named Maxi, a smaller version of human hauler for the route from Mohammadpur to Gulistan. More important is the proposed introduction of modern cab service for Dhaka city which is await government approval.

It can be reasonably expected that the government's approval in principle will soon be forthcoming. As to the question of details, it may also be expected that modern taxi cabs with metres and air conditioners and linked to wireless network may soon be familiar sights on Dhaka streets. According to potential investors in this sector, the taxi cab project, when implemented in the city, may turn out to be multi-billion taka industry in course of the next few years. In such exigencies, a dramatic change in the capital's unbearable traffic scene may seem inevitable. Some important aspects of the scheme, as proposed by the committee set up for the purpose, include maximum ceiling of CC of automobiles permissible as taxi cabs and their colour. One thing, however, seems to be certain: only new cars upto 2000 CC will be allowed to operate as cabs. As already decided by the Communication Ministry, re-conditioned cars will not be allowed to operate as cabs.

The economics of the business seems to indicate that, because of substantial concessions for imported new cabs to be used as cabs, a spur of competing attempts for acquiring business in this field seems inevitable. It is felt by observers that the intending cab operators see good business prospects ahead as there is a growing awareness among the city's public about the increasing environmental pollution created by auto-rickshaws and the chaotic traffic congestion for which the steady proliferation of cycle rickshaws are considered mainly responsible.

There are some items of other good news: the BRTC are due to import a good number of buses and some double-deckers. Until such additional vehicles are actually put on the roads to alleviate the suffering of the travelling public, there is no point in getting optimistic about their impact at this moment, as observed by most commuters.

Observers, however, have raised some vital questions about the present transport situation, both actual and projected. The horrendous growth of cycle rickshaws, most of which are without licence or carrying fake licences has assumed a stupendously unmanageable character in determining the present and future of the capital's traffic control. The problem has become so much complex and intertwined with the livelihood of thousands of rickshawpullers that someone in just observed that the person who can devise a viable plan for their rehabilitation through alternative occupations with real expedition, deserves a Nobel Prize.

Another very difficult issue is: How the limited space of the city's network of roads can cope with the rising tide of motorised vehicle of all descriptions, leaving aside the voluminous size of operating rickshaws which choke every inch of available space on city roads. There have been, of course, often-repeated suggestions for construction of ring roads and circular railways to lessen the pressure. Ring roads could accommodate the large number of heavy vehicles like lorries and buses. When a ring road is constructed around the city, there will be fewer vehicles on the main thoroughfares; while the introduction of circular trains will enable the commuters to enjoy greater mobility in comfort from place to place.

The bitter reality is that all these plans may seem utopian in the context of our present dearth of required economic resources. A more plausible solution seems, in the opinion of knowledgeable quarters, to be the establishment of satellite townships within easy distance from the city for diversion of the excessive pressure of population on the city. That too is a long drawn-out process requiring sufficient time for completion. Meanwhile we seem to be destined to wallow in the throes of rising unmanageable traffic waves in the city.

## Attack on Prime Textile: Sramik League forms probe body

From Our Correspondent  
NARAYANGANJ, Oct 10: The central committee of Sramik League labour front of the ruling Awami League has formed a two-member probe body to investigate alleged involvement of a local unit leader in the attack on Prime Textile Mills at Fatullah recently.

Sramik League President Ahsan Ullah Master MP told The Daily Star over telephone yesterday that the probe body comprising two vice presidents of the central committee — MA Hamid and Shukkur Mahmud — will see whether Kawsar Ahmed Palash, President of Fatullah thana Sramik League, was involved in the attack on October 2.

Palash was arrested on Wednesday and sent to jail in this connection.

Ahsan Ullah Master said probe body will submit its report in two days and the central committee will take action against Palash if he was found guilty.

## Chief Justice

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ciary. Commenting on the proposal, Justice Naimuddin stressed the quality of judges and said, "If the subordinate judges are competent enough then 90 per cent of the Supreme Court judges might be chosen from them."

## Jamuna bridge

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escalation at various stages, has already been delayed and is now likely to be ready for traffic by July 1 next year, the sources said.

A South Korean firm, Hyundai, is constructing the bridge.

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## Europe Summit opens with call for banning anti-personnel mines

STRASBOURG, Oct 10: President Jacques Chirac opened a two-day Council of Europe Summit today with an appeal for its 40 members to sign an agreement banning the use and production of anti-personnel mines, reports AFP.

The European leaders, called to endorse a wide-ranging series of proposals intended to boost individual rights for 770 million Europeans, heard the French President urge them to sign the treaty due to be signed in December in Ottawa. It was adopted at a conference in Oslo last month.

"I call on all members to sign, as of December, the treaty on a total ban on anti-personnel mines agreed last month in Oslo," Chirac said.

The message was directed primarily at Russia, which along with China and India, also suppliers of cheap anti-personnel mines, was not among the countries which on September 18 pledged in Oslo to sign the agreement.

Chirac's appeal on the mines issue, added at the last minute

to his prepared speech, came as the Nobel committee in Oslo named the international campaign to ban landmines and its coordinator Jody Williams, as winners of the 1997 Peace Prize.

The council of Europe Summit, attended by 21 presidents and 19 prime ministers, is the first since Russia joined the organisation in January last year.

The organisation is the continent's principal forum for discussing human rights and leaders are to discuss issues ranging from crime prevention and child protection to minority rights and a permanent European court of final resort.

The ultimate goal of the two-day gathering is to extend and consolidate rights across Europe, taking in Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Bloc, and to establish a distinctive European social model.

All 40 leaders are due to address the summit prior to the adoption Saturday of a final declaration and a plan of action.

## Khaleda: Some more time

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give military corridor in the name of transit forming sub-regional grouping, enhanced fuel prices and wholesale privatisation of state-owned enterprises and for full implementation of the Pay Commission report, just price of the agri-products, and implementing all election pledges by the ruling party, she explained.

"Neither we nor the people will tolerate the government's design to jeopardise the country's independence and sovereignty through their pre-election secret commitments to a neighbouring country", she remarked.

Turning to the Jatiya Sangsad, the Leader of the Opposition alleged that despite her party being the largest-ever parliamentary Opposition it was not allowed to speak in the House.

"While in the Treasury Bench, we respected the Opposition by giving them sufficient time to speak but they took the advantage for issuing various confusing statements. But now, most of our lawmakers are denied the floor while the Opposition Chief Whip, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and even myself are to shout a lot to get the microphone on," she said. "This is how they practise parliamentary democracy."

In this regard, she also criticised the Treasury Bench for failing to form the parliament-

tary standing committees as yet.

The BNP chief also came down heavily on the AL government for obstructing her party from holding public meetings and accused the government of using the police, ruling party activists and the civil administration against the BNP.

Chaired by the Zehad Smriti Parishad convenor Amanullah Aman, MP, the discussion meeting was also addressed, among others, by Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Prof AQM Badruddoza Choudhury and BNP leaders Dr Khan-dakar Mosharraf Hossain, MP and Sadek Hossain, MP.

## PPP leader shot dead

LAHORE, Pakistan, Oct 10: Unidentified assailants shot dead a central leader of former premier Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) here today, police said, reports AFP.

Arif Iqbal Bhatti, a former judge of the Lahore High Court and a senior PPP member here, was sitting in his office when the gunmen sprayed him with bullets and then fled, police said.

Bhatti was rushed to the hospital in critical condition but succumbed to his wounds.



BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia addressing a function on the occasion of Shaheed Zehad Day at the Institution of Engineers in the city yesterday. — Star photo

## Clampdown on trade unionists

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who is acting as head of a so-called task force assigned to fix trade unions in state-owned banks.

In case of Ibrahim Khaled, he was being pushed upward, being placed as deputy governor at the central bank, thanks to his own well-wishers within the government. Khaled is still surviving at Sonali Bank, at least until yesterday as he told The Daily Star. In most cases, the victims are not all that lucky.

Months ago, a foreign investor with a large factory at EPZ, Savar, came under unionists' fire when some workers sought trade union rights. The factory of Youngone, a large South Korean investment, had been closed for several days. The export processing zones are legally protected from trade union activity, which attracts foreign investors.

Barely three months ago, Bangladesh's perhaps the most prestigious manufacturing unit, Monno Ceramics, bore the brunt of local politics. In Manikganj, local leaders of the Awami League were known to have been involved in the incident, which stopped production for more than a month, but top government and party leaders intervened to bail Monno out of the crisis.

The situation is indeed baffling for the ruling Awami League.

The Minister of State for Labour, MA Mannan, says these are all "isolated incidents, each having its own different perspective." He says the Awami League or the government is not patronising them as a matter of

policy. The government displayed its determination to deal sternly with disruptive trade unionists as police on Wednesday put behind bars the key accused in the Prime Textile incident.

The arrest of Kausar Ahmed Polash, president of local chapter of Awami League's labour front who allegedly led a group of attackers into the Prime premises, sparked off massive demonstrations in Narayanganj Thursday. Sanity prevailed on the local leaders who sought to pacify the violent supporters of Polash.

Nor does the local MP, Shamim Osman, give his partyman Polash an unconditional support. Sramik League, which had tried to defend Polash since the October 2 incident, went for a rather unusual step by instituting a committee to find if Polash was responsible, while the state's legal system is taking its own course. Ahsanullah Master, one of the men responsible for the Tongi incident, is heading this committee.

The government now wants amendments to the Labour Code, for which a high-powered committee is working, in a bid to tighten the authorities' grip on trade unions.

A seven-member committee, formed late August, got down to business last week after the incidents in the major industrial hubs, notably Narayanganj and Tongi.

A draft of the new Code, prepared in 1992 by the National Labour Law Commission, is being examined by the commit-



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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visiting Dhakeswari Temple in the city yesterday. — Star photo

## PM visits 2 city Puja mandaps

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday visited two Puja mandaps in the city to see the celebration of Durga Puja, the greatest religious festival of the Hindu Community, reports UNB.

She first visited the Puja mandap at Dhakeswari Mandir at Plassey and then that of Ramkrishna Mission.

Addressing a gathering of Hindu devotees at Dhakeswari Mandir, Hasina said once people of all religions, including Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist, had sacrificed their lives for independence and now all we will have to fight unitedly to free the country from poverty and hunger.

Mahanagar Puja Parishad Chairman Chittaranjan Sarkar received the Prime Minister at the Puja Mandap of Dhakeswari Mandir.

Hasina was welcomed by Swami Akhbaranada Maharaj at the Puja Mandap of Ramkrishna Mission, where she also addressed a gathering.

## Zero-tariff access to exports

# EU likely to support LDC plea: Tofael

By Staff Correspondent

The European Union (EU) is likely to support Least Developed Countries' (LDCs) plea for a 'zero-tariff' access of their export items to industrialised and developed countries, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed said yesterday.

Tofael noted that in some recent meetings, a number of EU officials gave him the impression that EU would lend support to LDCs' cause during a forthcoming meeting, considered a crucial one from the 48 LDCs' point of view.

The high-level meeting on integrated initiatives for LDCs trade development will be held in Geneva on October 27-28 with the issue of duty-free access on top of the agenda, he pointed out.

Tofael said this while he, along with State Minister for Jute and Textiles AKM Faizul Haque, was listening to problems of Awami League workers last night at the party central office as part of the ministers' 'Meet the party workers' programme. After a gap of one week, the programme resumed yesterday.

Addressing the party workers Tofael said 570 million people live in the LDCs but their total share in world export volume is only 0.4 per cent.

Turning to domestic issues, particularly foreign investment, the minister mentioned the shortage of gas and power supply. He, however, said new power plants were in the offing and for extracting more gas, production sharing contracts with foreign companies were being signed. "Still, we will need two years' time to have the benefits of our present efforts."

Over 200 party workers were present at the conference room of AL office at that time. On their behalf, party leader Abdul Mannan said development of power and gas sectors must be expedited. Otherwise, all efforts for growth would produce nothing.

The commerce and industries minister also said, a meeting would be convened on October 15 where he would take stock of the newspaper situation, have talks with the state minister for information and newspaper owners.

State Minister Faizul Haque said Jute Ministry had asked banks to ensure proper use of loans sanctioned for buying jute.

City AL leaders Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Moya and Akhterul Alam also spoke briefly.

## New pay scale to affect private sector

By Staff Correspondent

The new pay scale for government officials and employees has made the private entrepreneurs worried, who feel that pressure will also come on them to raise salaries.

"The pay scale will create inflationary pressure and the government will have to generate the extra resource from within by raising its efficiency and reducing its size," said ASM Quasem, President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI).

Talking to The Daily Star he said since the private sector is profit-oriented, it will have to earn more to meet any demand for pay hike. But since business cannot be expanded at free will, the demand for more pay may create turmoil in the private sector, he added.

Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud, former adviser in the last caretaker government, said that instead of announcing new pay scale every five or six years, the government should have tagged salary rise with inflation.

"Pay should be adjusted every year in keeping with inflation," he told The Daily Star. "This will make budget easier and transparent, and the government will have a clear idea of its resource need and expenditure."

Meanwhile, a number of corporate chiefs told The Daily Star that their companies' budgets for the next year will come under pressure as the new pay

scale will have to be considered when fixing salaries.

"This will be reflected in our next balance sheet and the public share holders will," said the chief executive of a publicly listed company having leather business.

"We already had a 40 per cent rise in fuel budget of the company. Raise in power tariff has also hit us and is likely to drain out more money as tariff is to be adjusted every six months in keeping with dollar rate. If we have to give higher salaries, right now, we have to refix our product prices which are to hit the common consumers," said the executive director of a multinational pharmaceutical company.

## All BNP MPs

From Page 1

tion programmes. Tofael said that it was agitating for some 'non-issues'. In this regard, he mentioned ban on street rallies, peace process in Chittagong Hill Tracts and shifting of the floating bridge from Crescent Lake connecting late president Zia's mazar.

The minister said BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia had urged the authorities to speed up repair of the bridge on the Khowai river during her recent visit to Shayesthaganj. "Being inspired by her speech, we dismantled the floating bridge and took it to Khowai."

Referring to BNP's views on CHT issue, Tofael asked, "Who said that government would withdraw army from there?"

## Kenya

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Earlier, after winning the toss Bangladesh decided to field and the hosts amassed 347 for three in their stipulated 50 overs. Openers Deepak Chudasama and Kennedy Otieno set a world record by scoring 225 for the first wicket.

In their second match Bangladesh will take on Zimbabwe at the same venue today.

## UN pays \$3.3m

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The Department of Peace-Keeping Operations forwarded the cheques totalling 3.3 million US dollars to the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to UN, Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury. This week for onward despatch to the ministry of Foreign Affairs.

With this, the total dues paid by the UN to Bangladesh since the Prime Minister's visit, come to 26 million dollar.