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Down to Earth

Prospects for Improvement in City's Transport System

By A S M Nurunnabi

Lately there 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 (DUTR) 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 Utara-Farm Gate-Shahbagh-Motijheel; Mirpur Section 10 to Motijheel via Bejoy Swaraj; Utara-Mahakhal-Maghbazar; Gabtoli-New Market-Shahbagh-Motijheel. One of the recommended routes, namely Utara 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 principal will soon be forthcoming. As to the question of details, it may also be expected that modern taxi cabs with meters 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 matters relating to fares, maximum ceiling of CC of automobiles permissible as taxi cabs and their colour. One thing, however, seems to be a 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 cars to be used as cabs, a spurt 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 soon 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 licenses 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 rickshaw pullers that someone in jest 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 coming from place to place.

The bitter reality is that all these plans may seem utopian in the context of our present day 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.

Banglabazar Patrika staff call off strike

Journalists and employees of the daily Banglabazar Patrika yesterday called off their strike following a fruitful discussion with the management, reports UNB.

They went on a wildcat strike on Thursday to press for the implementation of the 5th Wage Board Award and withdrawal of the management's decision to terminate seven of its employees.

11 killed

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sore and Khulna.

Authorities ordered an

enquiry and put Locomaster Ali

Ahmed, Assistant Locomaster

Shahidul Islam and Guard of

the Rocket express Habibullah

under suspension.

A three-member high-power

complaint committee headed by Chief

Engineer, Western Zone, Chief

Traffic Manager and Chief Me

chanical Engineer of the Rail

way will probe the accident.

Railway sources in Dhaka

said the communication be

tween Khulna and Jeddah was

expected to be restored at 1 am

today.

UNB adds: Communications

Minister Anwar Hossain ex

pressed deep shock at the death

and injury of passengers in the

accident and expressed sympathy with the family members of those killed and injured.

The minister directed the au

thorities to take action against

those responsible for the ac

cident and also for proper treat

ment of the injured passengers.

Later, the Communication

Minister, the Education Minis

ter and high officials of the

Railway visited the spot and in

spected the rescue operation

there.

Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina yesterday expressed her

deep shock at the loss of lives in

the train accident.

Leader of the Opposition and

BNP Chairperson Begum Kha

leda Zia also expressed deep

shock at the loss of lives in the

train accident.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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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. The treaty was adopted at a conference in Oslo last month.

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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

From Page 1

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 implementation of 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

ary 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 Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain, MP and Sadek Hossain, MP.

She first visited the Puja mandap at Dhakeswari Mandir at Plessey 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 united to free the country from poverty and hunger.

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

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

Arif Jabbati, 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.

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

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 Jabbati, 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.

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