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Down to Earth Hopes on Satellite Town

By ASM Nurunnabi

When a city comes under the deadweight of over-population, it seeks relief in a number of alternatives. It either seeks relief through an overhead network of express ways or by-passes or goes underground. The third alternative is building satellite towns around the city. All these alternatives could be adopted together. But the overriding question is one of economics: where will the money come from.

In spite of the question of economics, the issue of satellite towns for early dispersal of people away from the metropolis has assumed great urgency. In the opinion of knowledgeable quarters, Dhaka city principally should be the workplace and the suburban belt the living space with efficient transport system. There will be other benefits. The pressure on housing and transport will ease off in the city as its pollution level falls. It may also make a robust economic sense in terms of monetary savings for the city dwellers.

In the above context, it is heartening news that the Minister for Public Works and Housing has directed the Rajdhanii Unnayan Kartirpakha (Rajuk) to take steps for implementation of the Purbachal Housing Project. The project is to be built on 2200 acres under Narayanganj district and 800

acres under Gazipur district with the aim of reducing population pressure on Dhaka metropolis.

The proposed project has many important aspects. It is the first satellite town project of the Rajuk which has been drawn up after detailed survey. The salient aspects of the project are that there will be 69 residential plots for multi-storied houses covering 400 acres of land, 86 industrial plots for pollution-free industries, and 726 commercial plots for banks, shopping complex and markets. Another 53 plots have been earmarked for recreation facilities. Provisions have also been made for setting up police outpost, post office, hospitals, fire service, water supply and sewerage system.

It is reported that the total number of persons that will be affected by acquisition of their lands will not exceed 3000, as the density of population in the area is only 4 per acre. Steps will be taken for the rehabilitation of the affected persons, besides payment of due compensation. The main attraction of the project is stated to be that its implementation will cause least damage to the natural environment of the area.

The time frame for the project is not yet clear. It is understood that the project could not be taken up for implementation

during the tenure of the past governments. One of the reasons for the delay was said to be complications that cropped up in the acquisition proceedings in respect of the area originally proposed for the project. The present government have taken the initiative in implementing the project by reducing the legal complications. And Rajuk has already made payments to the people as compensation for their lands acquired for the project.

The government has embarked on a mass housing scheme with an aim to resolve the acute problem of housing. The proposed Purbachal Project is viewed as a significant step in that direction. Particularly because it is located in the city suburbs. There is no doubt that considering the enormity and importance of the project work, we can only stress the point that the work needs to be handled on a priority basis.

There are pessimists who say that since 1995, we have seen a mixed bag of governments where promises and pledges were made, but few were delivered. In the case of Purbachal satellite town project, our fond hope is that the promise of due implementation of the project, as made by the present government, will be fulfilled with all expedition.

10000 Bangladeshis

From Page 1
 as yet as offices in Saudi Arabia were closed for weekend holidays on Thursday and Friday.

He expressed the hope that once the overstayers have obtained legal papers and have reported to the Saudi passport authorities, they normally should not have to worry. They are accepted as persons ready to leave Saudi Arabia. Their only concern would be how to avail a flight or a sea transport to go back home.

The Saudi government has also arranged transit facilities for the large number of illegal foreign workers in Jeddah, Pakistan, Sudan, the Philippines and Egypt, whose numbers are even more than that of the Bangladeshis, are gathering in that city.

Ambassador Chowdhury said that the immediate problem was arranging sufficient number of flights to carry the Bangladeshis back. Most of the overstayers, he said, had air tickets but sufficient flights of the Biman or the Saudia were not available.

Foreign Ministry officials and diplomatic sources, on condition of anonymity, said that the time limit for sending back overstayers required to be extended so that they could avail transports.

Ctg customs

From Page 1
 were reportedly being forged and sold in Dhaka to the unscrupulous importers who submit the same to the Customs authorities.

Although such practices are an open secret now in the Chittagong Customs House, they are hardly challenged even by Customs intelligence officials.

Official sources indicated that the practice of forgery in the papers of reconditioned vehicles could be traced out after examining the chassis codes of the vehicles, which are difficult to change.

A section of customs officials reportedly collect the chassis code books on personal interests to 'bargain' with the unscrupulous importers, the sources noted.

The NBR team during its visit last week reportedly advised the Customs authorities here to take help from chassis books unofficially before assessment of duties.

Instructions might be issued shortly to use chassis books officially before assessment of duties against imported vehicles, the sources said.

On the other hand, the security personnel at the port and the jetty Customs personnel, though well aware of the bad practices in taking delivery of vehicles from the port's P&F sheds, hardly follow the procedures to tally the papers with the actual condition of the vehicles, the sources informed.

Meanwhile, the sources said that vehicle quarters had become a place to somehow manipulate the review reports now underway.

Presently, several thousand imported vehicles are lying stockpiled at the port shed.

Rival AL factions clash over meeting venue at Sunamganj

From Staff Correspondent
 SYLHET, Oct 17: Two rival factions of Awami League staged chase and counter-chase over holding of a rally at the same venue at Srimangal thana headquarters at the same time today, called by them earlier.

Ten persons received minor injuries while the factions, led by Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and the other led by Mohibur Rahman Manik MP, exploded at least fifty crackers and charged each other.

The trouble began when Manik, along with his supporters, were going in a procession towards the premises of Tahir Plaza, the meeting venue at about 10.30 am. Activists of the rival faction obstructed them, resulting in a chase and counter-chase.

In the afternoon, they attempted again to 'capture' the venue, but charged away again. Both the groups exploded crackers.

Later, the group led by Manik held a rally at the premises of Jalalia Alia Madrasah.

Tension is prevailing in the town.

10 yrs jail

From Page 1
 people of Kaliganj and Palash thanas of Gazipur, and Kopala, Shibpur and Monohordi thanas of Narsingdi. Incumbent chairman of Jamalpur UP Abdul Baten Moral was among the accused.

After investigation, police framed charges against 41 people of five thanas of the two neighbouring districts.

The judge after examining the witnesses and records found three of the accused guilty of murder and acquitted 38 others.

He also ordered immediate release of four people—Sujit Chandra, Nazrul Islam, Tufania and Arju Mia—who had been detained after the incident.

BSF team in Cox's Bazar

COX'S BAZAR, Oct 17: The eight-member delegation of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), led by its Director General AK Tandon, arrived here today, reports UNB.

The BSF delegation, which has been holding border talks with BDR officials since Wednesday, will return to the capital tomorrow.

Ershad meets Kissinger, Baker, Christopher

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad separately met three former US Secretaries of States—Henry A Kissinger, James Baker and Warren Christopher—in Houston on Thursday, reports UNB.

Ershad is now in the USA to attend an international seminar on US foreign policy arranged by James Baker Institute.

Many a leader from across the world including ex-presidents George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev attended the seminar.

A JP press release said Ershad returned to Washington on Thursday night and will stay for three days to meet party leaders and workers living in the US.

CU Shibir leader held

From Staff Correspondent
 CHITTAGONG, Oct 17: A leader of the Islami Chhatra Shibir was arrested this evening from Chittagong University campus in connection with Bakul murder case.

Campus sources said some activists of Shibir staged demonstration on the campus protesting the arrest of Nasir Ullah, general secretary of Shibir, CU unit.

CHT

From Page 1
 process in the CHT.

Turning to development activities in the country, Hasina said expansion of the communication network is a major factor for economic development. Development of communication is essential for the country's progress, she added.

About the local government system, Hasina said the government has taken steps to run the wards and villages by the elected representatives for overall development of the rural areas.

The government has decided to accelerate the economic activities of the rural areas by developing a strong local government system, she said and mentioned a 'Government project to develop 'Adarsha Gram' (ideal villages) for which Tk 360 crore has been allocated.

The meeting was also addressed by Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju and Road and Railways Division Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat.

Food and Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury and some MPs were present.

People from all walks of life, including a huge number of villagers, came to the meeting held near the Dhaleshwari bridge on the Dhaka-Mawa Highway, 17 kilometres from the capital. Earlier, the Prime Minister unveiled the plaque of the bridge, cut a red ribbon and walked over the bridge, built at a cost of about Tk 16 crore.

Strategic decisions

From Page 1
 ing them a chance... education... healthcare...
 Wolfensohn has directed a change in the Bank philosophy in the past two and a half years. He told the press conference that the institution had now matured enough to accept criticism, and then change decisions or policies accordingly.

Referring to the Bank's thrust on curbing corruption, he said it was ready to help Bangladesh reform its public administration and financial sector, if asked by the government. "That's a decision for you to make. I am an outsider here. I am not your headmaster... I am your partner. I am not a policeman... I am a friend," he said.

"There is some evidence to suggest that nationalised banks and industries do get funds that may not be used in the best interest of the people and that creates opportunities for (corrupt) practices."

Wolfensohn was happy about the progress on privatisation and referred to his meetings with the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister. "I congratulated them on what is already being done... I think in whatever pace you can do you should... I did not come here waiving the flag of privatisation."

He said the bank's assistance for the proposed Ganges Barrage would depend on its feasibility assessment. "We are prepared to look at it after we have done a study," he said. "I am agnostic about it at the moment."

Asked on the Bank's negative attitude towards the Rooppur power project, he said: "We

don't finance nuclear projects anywhere."
 Wolfensohn also set aside suggestions that he had been impressed by "conducted tours", saying he was experienced enough to withstand propaganda.
 "I have been to 62 countries... If you drop me in a slum... I can smell whether I am being brainwashed," he told a questioner.

"After seeing the activities of BRAC, Grameen Bank and Proshika, I am confirmed in my belief that these grassroots organisations lead the world in terms of organisation and effectiveness in providing micro-credit, especially to poor women, and in the economic and social development of the villages," he was quoted to have said in a Bank statement.

Wolfensohn also met President Shahabuddin Ahmed, other government ministers, Opposition leader Khaleda Zia and representatives of civil society and the business community.

He spoke of an "effective dialogue between the Bank and the civil society", saying the two could help correct each other's wrongs which would lead to "a sense of inclusion rather than a sense of exclusion... so that we can have a peaceful development."

"There are issues may be we have got wrong and there are issues may be they have got wrong."

Wolfensohn disagreed with a questioner that the civil society only referred to NGOs here. He said he had met parliamentarians, academics, businessmen and leaders of the NGOs as representatives of the civil society.

Hundreds of deportees crowd Saudi airport

JEDDAH, Oct 17: Saudi Arabia launched a crackdown on illegal foreign workers today at the end of a three-month amnesty for tens of thousands of Asian and African "overstayers" to leave without penalty, reports AFP.

Hundreds of deportees, meanwhile, were huddled in groups by nationality at the airport and near the port in the Red Sea city of Jeddah waiting for passage home. Some said they had been waiting for almost three weeks.

Interior Minister Prince Naif bin Abdel Aziz warned that the penalties—of up to six months in jail and a maximum fine of 100,000 riyals (26,000 dollars)—would be "strictly implemented" for those who failed to take advantage of the amnesty.

Saudi nationals who have given shelter to overstayers and violators of residence and labour laws also risk being fined, up to 50,000 riyals, he reiterated, quoted in the Arab News.

Under a sponsorship system, foreign workers are brought into the country by Saudi nationals and companies and only allowed to work for their sponsors, if they change jobs, their status is no longer legal.

Most of the overstayers are former pilgrims to Islam's holiest sites in Makkah and Medina, near the port city of Jeddah, while others are run away from their sponsors.

Amid the rush to leave in time for the amnesty, airlines operating to Asia and Africa have reported heavy demand for seats.

At Jeddah Airport, some 200 Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Eritreans and Indonesians scrambled for tickets on overbooked flights out today.

Two Pakistanis stretched out on the ground outside the terminal, guarding bundles of clothes and mattresses tied up with rope for 100 Pakistanis from Medina, said they had been waiting five days.

Yemeni, Sudanese and Indian airline officials reported a wait of up to two weeks for economy class tickets.

At the former Jeddah Airport next to a deportation centre for those leaving by the port nearby, hundreds of Asians and Africans, mostly men, were squatted in the shade, huddled together by nationality.

More than 50 Bangladeshis said they had spent 20 days waiting for places on a ship, many of them with little food.

Together with Pakistanis, Egyptians and Sudanese, they have been sleeping on the pavements, some of them under makeshift tents. Others have found shelter under flyovers.

The taxi driver said many of the departing labourers had run away from companies which sponsored them for monthly salaries of between 275 and 600 riyals (60 to 150 dollars).

Chinese Vice Premier arrives Oct 21

Measures to bolster Dhaka-Beijing bilateral ties and understanding in various fields will be discussed during the visit of Chinese Vice Prime Minister Wu Bangqiu to Bangladesh next week, reports UNB.

Bangqiu will arrive in the capital on October 21 on a 3-day visit in the first leg of his visit to several countries in the South Asian region. The trip will also take him to Vietnam and other countries in the region.

"It's a goodwill visit to further strengthen the Chinese relations with the South East Asian nations," said a senior official of the Chinese embassy in the city yesterday.

Hanufa's long ordeal

From Page 1
 ferred to Brussels. The Chowdhury family flew to Brussels with Hanufa. As Hanufa's frail and malnourished body was about to give up, Azizul called a doctor one day in early December, 1984. The Belgian doctor was so taken a back to see her condition that he refused to check her unless "she was immediately taken a hospital."

did not see for four years. He told us that Hanufa did not want to come to Bangladesh and she did not recognise Kader and Rokeya as her parents", Rokeya Begum who still works as a part-time maid, told this correspondent.

The Kader family was however allowed by Azizul Haque to live on the plot he owned, Rokeya said.

It took Hanufa five months at the Brussels hospital to be able to walk on her feet again. By the time she was out of the hospital, Azizul had left Belgium and the authorities put Hanufa with a foster family where she grew up. She went to the Bangladesh Embassy in Brussels several times and demanded her passport. But she was turned out, she alleged. Eventually Hanufa was naturalised in Belgium and now she helps her husband with his catering business.

When contacted, a foreign office official in Dhaka said Azizul is now posted in Baghdad as the Charge d'Affaires of our mission. "He has suffered a lot for the whole thing. You see he did not get any promotion and his posting was withheld for

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World Bank President James D Wolfensohn called on Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia at her official residence in the city yesterday. —Star photo

1500 vehicles still stranded at 3 ghats

MANIKGANJ, Oct 17: Traffic jam at Aricha ghat eased today with the operation of a good number of ferries, reports BSS. BIWTC sources said a total of 23 ferries including 10 Ro-Ro ferries were pressed into service today in Aricha-Daulatdia and Aricha-Natakholia routes.

Despite ferrying of a large number of vehicles, about 1500 remained stranded at the three ghats. Last night, there were more than two thousand vehicles in these ghats.

Road accidents

From Page 1
 dent of Independent University, was driving the car.

The bodies were handed over to their families after autopsy at DMCH morgue.

Police seized the car and filed a case with Gulshan thana. UNB adds: Three traders were killed and seven others wounded in a road accident at Ballapur in Savar early today, police and hospital sources said.

Mosarrar Hossain, 55, and Kohinur, 40, died on the spot, and an unidentified trader was killed on way to hospital. All the deceased were the inhabitant of Manikganj.

The accident occurred when a truck loaded with perishable goods coming from Dhaka overturned near Raj Filling Station on the Dhaka-Aricha highway at 4.30 am.

All the injured were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Police seized the truck but its driver and helper fled the scene.

Magurchhara

From Page 1
 eliminated.

The isotopes (the radioactive elements or sources) were kept in a container near the drilling point before the explosion. The whole container went under soil in the explosion," said a source.

After the explosion, neither the government nor the Occidental mentioned anything about the loss of the container.

Such radioactive sources, if exposed, could cause cancer. These isotopes remain radioactive for hundreds of years. If these were left exposed, they could have damaged the whole of the affected Magurchhara area.

These are common elements in gas exploration. They are hazardous but not up to a big extend," said an expert.

"This incident" certainly jolts us to look deeply into the Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) we have signed with the foreign companies and check whether the foreign companies would properly compensate for the environmental consequences of such a disaster," the expert added.

Wolfensohn stresses political stability Khaleda apprises WB chief of govt's 'anti-people acts'

Bangladesh needs political stability, improved law and order situation and discipline in banking sector for attracting foreign investment and for development, reports UNB.

Visiting World Bank President James D Wolfensohn said this while talking to BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia at her 29 Minto Road official residence in the city yesterday.

Briefing newsmen after the hour-long meeting, former finance minister M Baifur Rahman said Wolfensohn had described the law and order situation as "terrible".

The WB President also said that the country's economy is in bad shape and banking sector precarious, according to Saifur.

"I am afraid of the law and order situation. Before coming here, I thought that those things occurred only in Pakistan in South Asia," Saifur quoted Wolfensohn, as saying during the meeting.

WB's Vice President for South Asian region Meiko Nishimizu, WB Resident Mission Chief in Dhaka Pierre Landell-Mills and IFC Director Rashad Kaldany were present at the meeting.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Standing Committee member M Saifur Rahman, MP, and M Morshed Khan, MP, were also present.

Saifur said the WB President expressed his concern over the "critical" situation in the banking sector.

Referring to recent appointment of a Bangladesh Bank official in Sonali Bank and of a Sonali Bank official in the central bank, Wolfensohn said he didn't understand the choice of the government.

Fire at city garments factory

By Staff Correspondent
 Some electronic goods, furniture and some documents were damaged in a fire at a garments factory at Khilkhet in the city on Thursday night.

Fire Brigade sources said the fire broke out in an office room of Van Happen Fashion house in the third floor of Khilkhet Supt thana at about 11.30 pm.

The origin of the fire could not be known till last night. However, police suspected that faulty electric line sparked off the fire.

WB chief

From Page 1
 oment projects.

The World Bank President praised the programmes of the Bangladesh government undertaken for alleviation of poverty.

He discussed with the Prime Minister the importance of cultural activities to raise awareness level of the people and emphasised the expansion of education and cultural activities, which he said will help alleviate poverty.

Wolfensohn, who has visited some rural areas of the country, described his experience to the Prime Minister and appreciated the operations of micro-credit system and various development programmes also taken by the NGOs.

The Prime Minister listed steps undertaken by her government to remove illiteracy within next 10 years which will help contribute in poverty alleviation. She also mentioned various development programmes of the government which are now in hand.

Sheikh Hasina lauded the role of Wolfensohn in giving the World Bank a new sense of direction.

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria, Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Dr SA Samad, ERD Secretary Mashur Rahman, World Bank Vice-President Meiko Nishimizu, the bank's Resident Representative to Bangladesh Pierre Landell Mills and Alternative Executive Director Syed Ahmed were present.

The World Bank President told Begum Zia that foreign investment in Bangladesh depends on improved law and order situation and political stability.

Begum Zia said improvement of the law and order situation and political situation depends on sincerity of the government.

The WB President expressed the view that BNP should resolve the current political conflicts between government and opposition parties through discussion.

Begum Zia said though her party was "deprived" in last general election, it joined the parliament for the continuation of the democratic process in the greater interest of the nation.

But, she alleged, the opposition MPs are not allowed to speak in the parliament and the government is taking important national decision bypassing the parliament.

Saifur said the opposition leader apprised the WB President of political persecution, repression on opposition and other anti-people activities of the government.

She said more than 200 BNP workers were killed in last 16 months and thousands of others are being harassed by the government.

Begum Zia said the government is jeopardising democratic process by curbing people's democratic rights and resorting to repression on opposition. "Sometimes, we are compelled to go for street protest due to such behaviour of the government," she added.

In this context, Wolfensohn wanted to know from Begum Zia if President Shahabuddin Ahmed could resolve the political crisis.

Ganges Barrage

From Page 1
 oment of Bangladesh.

The barrage project, when implemented, would save 40 million people of southeastern Bangladesh from the impending environmental and ecological disaster, Razzak told Kawamura.

Razzak had also fruitful and constructive discussions with Japanese Vice Minister for Construction and the presidents of JICA and OECF. He also met presidents of leading Japanese companies and urged them to assist Bangladesh for implementation of the project which will help develop water management sector in Bangladesh.

CEC

From Page 1
 feel, are necessary for strengthening the culture and practice of democracy."

He thanked the President for highlighting the need for electoral reforms and giving suggestions while inaugurating the workshop the day before.

The CEC said that electoral laws now in force in the country were formulated a quarter-century ago. "During the period, society and politics in Bangladesh have undergone a series of changes, some of which, like the institution of Non-party Caretaker Government, are of fundamental nature," he added.

"Although the electoral laws have been amended from time to time, we are yet to see a coordinated and comprehensive review to take stock of the socio-political changes and rising expectations of the people."

With FEMA chairperson Fakhruddin Ahmed in the chair, the closing session of the workshop was also attended by, among others, Rajandar Sachar, former chief justice of Delhi High Court, B R Mainali, President of the Jurist Council, Nepal, Damso G Magbual of NAMFREL, The Philippines, Jeevan Thiagarajah, Director of ICES, Colombo, Hussain Naqi, freelance columnist, Pakistan and members of the FEMA National Committee.