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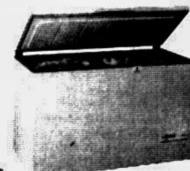
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# Down to Earth

## Autorickshaws & Emerging Substitutes

By ASM Nurunnabi

Leaving aside the rickshaws which have become a serious drag on quick movement of vehicular traffic and thereby causing horrendous traffic jams in the city, we may look upon autorickshaws as a more useful vehicle in this respect. But autorickshaws are not considered an unmixed blessing in the city's transport system, mainly because of their contribution to air pollution as they use two-stroke engines.

A controversy has already been raging as to which type of autorickshaws should be given preference in the city's transport sector — the autorickshaws and tempos produced by Bangladesh Autocar Limited, a automobile assembly plant, set up in 1986 at Konabari, Joydebpur, with credit from Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS) and with technical collaboration with Piaggio VE Italy, the world famous manufacturer of Vespa brand products; on the other hand, there are autorickshaws manufactured by Bajaj Auto of India.

Lately it has been reported that Bajaj autorickshaws get more registration and route permits than the tempos produced by the BSRS. It is contended that the technology used by Bajaj is old and the authorities in India have already banned Bajaj autorickshaws from Indian cities following anti-pollution campaign. On the other hand, the BSRS claims that Vespa is "environment-friendly" and is widely used in Italy and other European countries, as the per capita smoke emission from the Vespa tempo is claimed to be the "lowest".

Whatever be the actual position, there is hardly any dispute about two-stroke engines being environment unfriendly. A total ban on such machines either locally assembled or imported

may not, therefore, be unwellcome, as held by observers. In this backdrop of this not-so-happy situation, some silver linings may be noted. It was lately reported that taxi cabs would be introduced in the city soon. Some observers wonder how an emerging mega-city like Dhaka could do without this mode of transport for so long.

However, it is expected that the new facility has come here to stay, and stay in a most viable manner. The initial problems to be encountered by the passengers and taxi drivers need to be sorted out in such matters as keeping the taxi metre in order, checking for tampering of such metre, ensuring a convenient system for recording and easy reading of the mileage and fares.

In this context, there is a suggestion for converting all imported taxi cabs into CNG (compressed natural gas)-type engines for the sake of making environment pollution-free and for bringing down the mileage cost which will make taxi travelling cheaper.

Next is a happy development represented by the recent announcement that 200 new double-decker buses will be introduced soon in some metropolitan cities of the country. The introduction of new double-deckers is undoubtedly most needed in Dhaka. The efficiency and suitability of double-deckers in Dhaka's road transport situation is already proven.

Double-deckers occupy least road space for maximum number of passengers, with easy room for women and elderly bus-riders. Dhaka roads, on the other hand, where some double-deckers already ply, are wide enough for smooth operation, without causing traffic discomfort in embankment, parking or in wheels. As long as double-deck-

ers should operate in sufficient numbers they would be able to provide a public transport service of sorts which, though not ideal, would be better than nothing. Bus riders in Dhaka still yearn for the old double-deckers, only a couple or so of which have remained operative in an unsatisfactory state of fitness for roads.

City dwellers have already realised the fact that bus-riding remains the most coveted means of public transport in the city. The introduction of luxury coaches on certain city routes has already become popular with some sections of passengers who can afford their fares. But for the greater majority of commuters in greater Dhaka in lower income brackets, the promise of a new fleet of double-deckers for the Dhaka streets will be a great relief and a boon.

The launching of air-conditioned Metro Bus Service on Dhaka-Narayanganj route can be viewed as another step in right direction. A few months ago, inauguration of Dhaka-Narayanganj train service under private management, judging by initial popular response, has proved a successful undertaking.

The fact is that in public transport sector, the metropolis still lacks the basic facilities of a modern network. The potential of mass transit railway system, as in other developed countries, in easing the metropolitan transport problem has not been tapped. The bottom line is that there is no single answer to Dhaka city's transport problem. All the possible alternatives need to be thoroughly explored and the feasible ones ensuring greater benefits with the maximum possible economy should be adopted with all expedition, keeping in view the fast pace of growth of city population.

## Meghnaghat project

From page 1

The Purchase Committee of the Cabinet in a meeting earlier this month reviewed the project profile and suggested that AES would have to agree on certain terms first.

The Purchase Committee opined that AES must agree to maintain a 10-month IOP, a period when a power plant developer sets up gas turbine to generate electricity first and steam turbine at the end. When the steam turbine is set, the power plant starts generating power to the optimum level.

The U.S. company, which has offered zero tariff during the IOP, had been saying that it would set up the steam turbine within six months of setting up of the gas turbine.

The PDB has been opposing this saying that it would reduce the zero tariff period of the Meghnaghat Power Project. Supporting this view, the Purchase Committee raised a question as to why AES should reduce the free electricity period.

Secondly, the Purchase Committee said that AES must provide equipment manufactured by multinational company ABB. The Committee said that AES's proposed power plant configuration was based on ABB equipment or equivalent. Therefore it should provide ABB machinery.

ABB is also one of the five shortlisted companies that had participated in the Meghnaghat Project bidding.

This is why questions have been raised about AES's tariff proposal all along; whereas it used ABB or equivalent machinery configuration to calculate its power tariff. Its offer is lower than the tariff offered by ABB itself, said a source.

Sources added, a meeting between the government and the AES will take place soon and AES will be asked to revise its proposal.

Despite its fantastic tariff offer, there has been so much of

## Biswa Ijtema

From page 1

the emergency patients. Police administration has taken special arrangements to maintain law and order.

More than 1,000 constables, five Additional SP, 12 ASP, and 50 sub-inspectors have been deployed to ensure security of the devotees.

Besides, four squads of DB police with 25 sub-inspectors have been deployed in the area. Bangladesh railway will operate special trains between Dhaka and Tongi on Monday.

Devotees from 57 countries, including Pakistan, India, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, Yemen, France, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, South Africa and Thailand have already reached the Ijtema place.

questions about AES's technical issues that the whole project should be re-evaluated before moving towards the final phase, noted an energy expert.

AES's representatives, when contacted over the phone, refused to comment on the issue. Meanwhile, the Energy Ministry identified some irregularities in the bidding procedure of the PDB in procurement of land and its development for the project.

The sources claimed that PDB has recommended one bidder out of the four for land procurement and development without opening the offers of all the four bidders.

PDB opened three proposals. Among the three, the lowest offer was of Tk 123 crore. The second lowest offer was of Tk 3000 crore. The difference between the two was amazing, the source said.

These proposals, now being questioned by the Ministry, will be forwarded to the Cabinet Purchase Committee as the Ministry does not deal with bids worth over Tk 25 crore.

## Petrol bombs found near Ershad's office

Police recovered five live petrol bombs from near the Jatiya Party chairman's office at Baridhara in the city at about 7 pm yesterday, reports UNB.

Officer-in-charge of Gulshan thana, Aurangzeb said bombs were put in water to make those neutralised.

## 40 schoolgirls expelled for having long nails

ABU DHABI, Feb 13: A United Arab Emirates (UAE) government school has expelled 40 schoolgirls for having long nails, newspapers reported today, says AFP.

Umm Ammar Secondary School in Abu Dhabi told the students they would only be allowed to return to class if they cut their nails.

"The school administration asked them to bring their parents to give assurances that they will not grow their nails again," a school official said.

## Ahmadia Jamaat convention begins

By Staff Correspondent

The three-day annual convention of Ahmadiya Muslim Jamaat began yesterday at its Bakshi Bazar office, said a press release of the Jamaat.

The convention was inaugurated by Jamaat's Bangladesh chapter Ameer Alhaj Meer Muhsin and welcomed address was delivered by chairman of Jalsa Committee Prof. Meer Mobashwer Ali.

## JP clarifies

### No possibility of Ershad-Khaleda talks in KSA

Jatiya Party has ruled out the possibility of a meeting between its Chairman HM Ershad and BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia in Saudi Arabia on the present political situation of the country.

"It's simply a coincidence that the two leaders are now in Saudi Arabia... but there is no possibility of any meeting on any issue between them," said JP additional secretary general Nazim Rahman Manju.

Talking to UNB over telephone last night, he said the JP chairman was scheduled to go to Saudi Arabia on February 5 for a medical check-up, but was delayed for visiting USA and UK at that time.

"The schedule was fixed when he (Ershad), after release from jail, first went to Saudi Arabia six months ago for treatment. He didn't want to change the physicians and for this reason, went there again," Manzur added.

Former President and JP Chairman Lt Gen (Ret) HM Ershad left Dhaka yesterday noon for Riyadh. He is scheduled to return home on February 21.

## Biman crew

From page 1

today, CID sources said. "I saw my husband almost nude when I met him in court custody. He could not even talk to me as he was looking pale and weak," Nuruzzaman's wife Sabina Huq Shilpi had said while talking to The Daily Star in June.

Family members of the Biman crew claimed that Tejgaon police did not even allow Nuruzzaman to contact them after he was arrested on June 13. However, an unnatural death case was lodged with Sutrapur thana following the death of Nuruzzaman. But the then Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), AK Al Mamun, ordered filing of a murder case after the autopsy report showed that it was a case of homicide.

The Forensic Department of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital said that the Biman crew was seriously injured in the left chest and abdomen. The post mortem did not need any chemical analysis to find out the actual cause of the death as it was clear that the death resulted from physical torture.

Following Nuruzzaman's death, the DMP in a report to the Home Ministry had said that the Biman crew had a fist fight with some other inmates in court custody. It added that the fight as well as suffocation in the congested room while in custody might be the reason for the death, according to reports.



An exhibition of roses jointly organised by the Dhaka Club Limited and National Rose Society was held on the club premises yesterday. — Star photo

## Film stars add glammers to Indian polls campaign

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: Come elections and it is time for several Indian film stars to move away from the camera and rub shoulders with the fans who idolise them on the silver screen.

The presence of film personalities to boost electioneering is nothing new in India as stars of by gone eras like Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar and Balraj Sahni had drawn crowd at polls rallies for parties. In recent years, Sunil Dutt, Shabana Azmi and Raj Babbar campaigned for one party or the other. Dutt also contested successfully on a Congress ticket from Mumbai. But with the passage of time, more and more film stars have moved into the political and election arena.

In southern India, especially in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, film stars are cult figures and with the help of this at least three of them — M G Ramachandran, his political disciple and co-star Ms Jayalalitha Jayaram and NT Rama Rao — made it really big as politicians.

Ramachandran and Jayalalitha had served as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu while Rama Rao was the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. All three of them played a key role in national politics also after the emergence of the era of coalition governments.

The trend of roping in film stars either as candidates or as campaigners was set by Congress in recent times which fielded the big 'B' of Indian cinema Amitabh Bachchan in Allahabad parliamentary constituency in 1984. Then came another matinee idol of the Hindi film industry Rajesh Khanna who fought Lok Sabha elections on a Congress ticket thrice from New Delhi constituency. Khanna was assisted in the campaign by his actress wife Dimple Kapadia and daughter Twinkle Khanna, also an actress.

Not to be left behind, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) brought in Shatrughna Sinha, the "perennial villain" of Hindi cinema, for its electioneering and Nitish Bhardwaj and Ms Deepika who soared to stardom after playing the roles of Lord Krishna and Sita respectively in the mega television serials "Mahabharata" and "Ramayana" came years back. Since then, more and more parties have gone in for film stars to add glammers to their campaign.

The current parliamentary elections also finds several film

personalities either joining the campaign or jumping into the fray as nominees of different parties.

The BJP has succeeded in securing the services of maximum number of film stars and most of them are in Andhra Pradesh where the party has formed an alliance with one faction of Telugu Desam Party headed by late N T Rama Rao's wife Lakshmi Parvathi. Tamil film actress Gautami and Telugu star Vijayashanthi joined BJP recently and Andhra Pradesh's leading actor-director Mohan Babu chipped in to boost the saffron surge.

To counter BJP's bid for an inroad in Andhra Pradesh, the state's ruling Telugu Desam Party led by Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has roped in five film stars including Jaya Prada, who played a leading role in the party's victory in the previous state assembly elections, three-time national award-winning actress T Sharada, who is in the fray in the coming polls also, Ramya Krishna and character actor Satyanarayana and well-known comedian Rajendra Prasad.

In Tamil Nadu, actress Radhika, is campaigning for ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of Chief Minister M Karunanidhi and actor Sharad Kumar is a party nominee in the coming polls. In northern India, the star-struck constituency is Gurdaspur in Punjab where Vinod Khanna, a big name in Hindi films, is the BJP candidate who faces a Herculean task of defeating a lady Congress nominee who had won three times in a row. Although Khanna drew large crowd when he reached Gurdaspur town to file nomination along with his wife, it remains to be seen if he could translate them in his favour.

Besides, actor Shatrughna Sinha and former heavyweight wrestler Dara Singh, who also acted in a number of movies, have added muscle to BJP's campaign in seven Lok Sabha constituencies in Delhi, a traditional stronghold of the saffron party.

The Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh has fielded leading filmmaker Muzaffar Ali, who shot into prominence with his award-winning film "Umrao Jaan", against BJP's prime ministerial candidate Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lucknow parliamentary constituency in the coming elections. Ali had earlier contested unsuccessfully the assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh state as a candidate of Samajwadi Party in 1993.

## BNP leader shot dead in Kushtia

JHENIDAH, Feb 13: A BNP leader was shot dead at village Abdalpur in Kushtia sadar thana yesterday morning, police said, reports BSS.

The victim Jamat Ali, 40, of village Talpoth in Hari-nakunda thana of Jhenidah district was killed by some armed cadres of outlawed Gano Bahini.

Police and eyewitnesses said, a group of gunmen fired at Jamat Ali while he was going to Kushtia by a motor cycle at 11 am. He died on the spot.

Kushtia police sent the body to hospital for autopsy. A case was filed with Kushtia police station in this connection. None was arrested.

## Boy killed in bomb blast

A five-year-old boy was killed and five others were injured in a bomb blast at Mandail in Jinjira yesterday, reports BSS.

Police said, the bomb exploded at around 12:30 pm when the boys were playing with the home-made bombs without knowing what these are. The bombs were kept in a polythene bag. Rubel died on the spot. Of the injured, two children were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) while others were released after first aid.

## Indian Ocean Rim

From page 1

objective of forging a new economic bloc of the littoral states of the Asia-Pacific region to provide a common platform for augmenting and diversifying trade among the member states.

Bangladesh had always been keen on entering the new grouping. Although there are 47 countries on the Indian Ocean Rim, Bangladesh, the third largest country in the region was initially not considered for being included. Besides, Bangladesh, two other SAARC countries who are also littoral states, Pakistan and Maldives were also not included. IORARC was officially set rolling through a two-day meeting of foreign ministers in Mauritius on March 6 and 7 last year.

During the formative stage of the organisation, initially known as Indian Ocean Rim (IOR), the Indian government in 1995 reportedly opposed the inclusion of several countries including Bangladesh. India reportedly lifted its objection after Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina conferred with then prime minister Deve Gowda and then external af-

airs minister IK Gujral earlier last year. The idea of Indian Ocean Rim grouping was first mooted during a visit of then foreign minister of South Africa P Botha to New Delhi in November, 1993. The maiden meet that floated the concept was held in Mauritius in May, 1995. The key movers were India and South Africa along with Australia, Oman, Kenya, Singapore and Mauritius. These seven countries formed the initial core group. In the second phase, following consensus among the core members, seven more countries were accepted as members.

The countries admitted in the second stage are Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Yemen, Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar, raising the total to 14.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh along with some other countries has attended the 'Track-2' meetings held under the aegis of the Indian Ocean Rim Consultative Business Network (IORCBN) and Indian Ocean Rim Research Network (IORRN) in New Delhi and Durban.

## Two RU Shibir activists held

From RU Correspondent RAJSHAHI, Feb 13: At least two Islamic Chhatra Shibir activists were arrested from Shah Mokhdum Hall of Rajshahi University last night.

The two — Shamim and Wasim — were picked up by police, along with at least 10 outsiders, from the TV room of the hall.

Some resident say of the hall that the arrests were made because of bomb explosions on the campus in the afternoon. But Shibir's hall unit president claimed that the action was linked with yesterday's 'giant rally' of Shibir against 'police torture' on their activists.

## Delhi confident

From page 1

Chetia is a political refugee. A Bangladesh court, urged by another human rights group, on Thursday asked jail authorities to ensure Chetia gets adequate medical treatment. He is reportedly suffering from high blood pressure and dysentery.

The two others have been charged with illegal entry and stay in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the hearing on the writ petition filed by the Bangladesh Human Rights Commission against what it called the 'government's intention to hand over Chetia to Indian authorities has been fixed on Sunday, according to reports.

## Detention

From page 1

(CrPC). Chetia now faces three specific cases of illegal entry into Bangladesh, procuring Bangladeshi passports under fake identity and illegally possessing foreign currency.

The two others have been charged with illegal entry and stay in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the hearing on the writ petition filed by the Bangladesh Human Rights Commission against what it called the 'government's intention to hand over Chetia to Indian authorities has been fixed on Sunday, according to reports.

The hearing was scheduled for Tuesday last.

## Int'l seminar concludes Call to compile history of Sylhet based on facts

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Feb 13: The three-day international seminar on 'Sylhet: History and Heritage' ended here today with a call for more research and study to compile a history of Sylhet based on facts.

Sylhet has a rich heritage with its distinctive culture. It was a basic unit of administration long ago, speakers at the seminar said.

Participants from India, Japan, Holland and UK also took part in the seminar.

As many as 25 papers on different subjects like local governance, language and literature, Liberation War, education system, economy, art and culture and mineral resources of Sylhet region were read out and discussed in different sessions on the concluding day today. Those who took part or read out papers included, Prof Amirul Islam Chowdhury, Prof Sharif Uddin Ahmed, Prof Abul Kalam Manjur Morshed, Syed Abul Moksud, Prof Abul Bashar, Syed Mostafa Kamal, Prof KM Mohsin, Dr Rafiqul Islam Psc, Dr Badrul Imam, Dr Jaheda Ahmed, Prof Wakil Ahmed, Prof Monsur Musa, Najmul Haque Mojumder, Principal Mohiuddin Shiru and Prof Abdul Aziz.

Former finance minister M

Saifur Rahman MP addressed the concluding session of the seminar as chief guest. The seminar was organised by the Bangladesh History Association.

The session was presided over by the former registrar of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology while British High Commissioner David C Walker was the special guest.

## Gold seized at Ctg Airport

CHITTAGONG, Feb 13: The customs surveillance team today seized three kgs of gold worth about Taka 17 lakh from two passengers at the Chittagong Airport today, reports BSS.

Customs and airport sources said, customs officials challenged two passengers who arrived from Abu Dhabi.

Customs officials recovered 419 chains and eight rings from Shaha Alam and some 205 chains, a mobile phone and 2000 pieces of torch-light bulbs, from Shamsul Alam.

The ornaments were deposited to the customs department and a case was filed in this connection.

## SMC leader

From page 1

discussion was going on between the management and the union to resolve the existing problem.

He said that instead of holding a scheduled meeting on February 8 the authorities closed the company by deploying police. He termed the lock-out a "conspiracy to misappropriate a huge fund."

The union filed a case with the Labour Court on Tuesday demanding that their legitimate demands be met and its 550 employees and workers saved from uncertainty.

The demands include stoppage of frequent transfers and dismissals as well as pay hike. "But the authority had been ignoring their demands for a long," the SMC labour union president said.

## 7-party alliance

From page 1

parties who were engaged in the anti-accord movement.

It asked the government to bring down the prices of essentials by ensuring adequate supply of commodities. The meeting warned that the government will have to bear the responsibility if anybody dies from hunger.

The meeting was attended by Abdul Kader Mollah and ATM Azharul Islam of Jamaat, Moinuddin Bhuiyan and Shamim Al Mamun of JP (Zafar), Oli Ahad of Democratic League, Nurul Haq Majumder of NDA, and Sheikh Shaokat Hossain Nilu of PNP.

## Smuggled arms

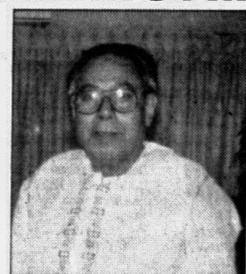
From page 1

Coast Guards arrested 74 arms smugglers following a brief fight between them, the BBC report said yesterday.

During interrogation, the arms smugglers confessed that they were citizens of Myanmar and Thailand. They collected the arms and ammunition from Khmar Rouge guerrillas of Cambodia to supply those to the separatists in North-East India who have been fighting for liberation, the report said.

They also displayed various items of rural foods like pitha, payesh and sweets.

## IN MEMORIAM



The first death anniversary of Al-Haj Reazuddin Ahmed (Bhola Mia) will be observed today, Saturday, 14th February, 1998.

A Milad Mahfil will be held after Asr prayers at House No 83, Road No 23, Gulshan-1.

All his friends, relatives and well-wishers are requested to attend the Milad and pray for salvation of the departed soul.

Sajeda Reaz and Family Members

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