



Bangladesh Air Express International Limited

PLEASE CONTACT:
Head Office Tel: 9565114, Logistics Office Tel: 9884851, Fax: (880-2) 9886531, E-mail: dac@aelogis.com
Chittagong Office Tel: (031) 721085, Fax: (880-31) 710106, Internet: fedgcp@spectnet.com.smt.p
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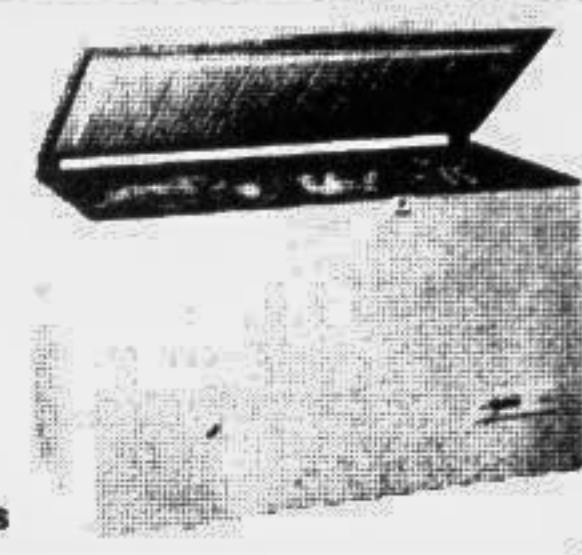


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Down to Earth

The Dream for Low-cost Housing

By A S M Nurunnabi

The concept of low-cost housing has been getting increasing attention lately from quarters concerned with one important aspect of the development needs of a society seeking economic progress. This aspect relates to the need for creating housing facility for people of small means in the city, most of whom live in small shanties.

There is no denying the magnitude of the problem in the context of an ever sprawling metropolis, where the alarming rate of population growth tends to upset all calculations. The problem has been compounded by the rising toward movement of people affected by several adverse economic factors, the more important of which lie in the absence of employment opportunities in the rural areas.

It is obviously regrettable that the city planners have not yet found any effective way of solving the problem. Reportedly, the government has initiated some low-cost housing projects with the objective of accommodating the urban poor. Such projects, if implemented with urgency, may tend to take some pressure off the growing burden of city population. But

in reality, all these exercises, being of limited scope, will barely touch the fringe of the problem. Rajuk has lately announced plans for uplift of six city areas. According to the chief town planner of Rajuk, under the new planning approach in the proposed new areas, the government would play the role of an enabler. And the private sector would do development activities with people's participation.

In this strategy of development, it is felt that there should be no missing of the important point of low-cost housing for people of small means. According to informed sources, there is at present no dearth of knowledge on low-cost housing technology. Sri Lanka is said to be a prominent example in this respect. To make the project of low-cost housing really helpful for people of small means, the government may provide lands at subsidised rates to interested private developers and put a ceiling on their profit margins so that the people for whom the projects are meant are really benefited. Land may be acquired by government where necessary

for such projects as for construction of roads and other infrastructural facilities. There should be no illusion about the consequences that are sure to follow our sustained failure to cope with the problem. When a big chunk of the city population is left without a place to live in, some serious environmental problems are bound to arise. Already the slums of Dhaka are a threat to public health and this is likely to get worse. Last year's estimates suggested that life more livable for these people if only for selfish reasons such as the need to prevent the potential of the city being eroded. Low-cost housing development could be the first important step in alleviating urban poverty.

With the conditions within the slums worsening, it is time to take action before disease overtakes us. This gloomy prospect should make us realise that something must be done on an emergency basis to make life more livable for these people if only for selfish reasons such as the need to prevent the potential of the city being eroded. Low-cost housing development could be the first important step in alleviating urban poverty.

Every opinion poll has pointed to approval when the ballots are counted tomorrow in both Northern Ireland and the neighbouring Irish Republic, where voters were being asked to drop their country's constitutional claim to the British-ruled north as part of the historical agreement. "Anything for peace," said Deborah McCarron, after casting a 'yes' vote at St. James' Primary School in Creggan, a mainly Catholic district of Londonderry, 160 kms from here.

Under gray, overcast skies, Protestant Alistair Simpson, Londonderry leader of the Apprentice Boys fraternal order, somberly voted 'no' at a booth set up in a Salvation Army hall in the province's second city. "This is a sellout," Simpson said. "It's first step to a united Ireland and we won't have it."



Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga (left) inaugurating the SAARC Communication Ministers' conference in Colombo yesterday. Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim is seen on her left. — AP/UNB photo

Ireland votes on peace deal

BELFAST, May 22: After three decades of bloodshed and six weeks of bitter bickering, the politicians fell silent today as voters turned out in apparently record numbers to decide whether to accept the Belfast peace accord.

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Majority 'yes' votes in both parts of Ireland would clear the way to implement the agreement struck on Good Friday — April 10 — by the British and Irish governments and eight northern parties.

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101-member BNP body to observe Zia's death anniversary

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Suharto

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President urges politicians Include family planning in party programmes

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Trans-Asian Highway

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One arrested on charge of torturing wife

By Staff Correspondent

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