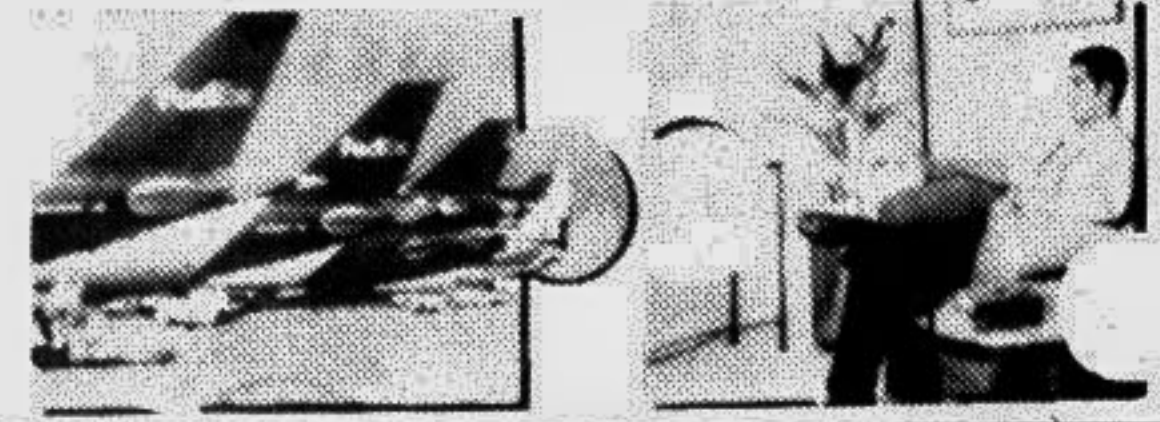


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Down to Earth

City's a awesome congestion

By A S M Nurunnabi

The Dhaka metropolis, in terms of population and other infrastructural aspects, has been bloating to such an extent that it seems it may be bursting at the seams. The vastly expanding process has lately assumed awesome aspects so much so that the livability of the city seems to be at stake. The foremost alarming aspects relate to sheer population explosion of the city with corresponding harrowing deficiencies primarily in such sectors as transport and communication, energy consumption and housing.

The transport and communication sectors with their attendant snarls-up in the city seem to be going from bad to worse in spite of some palliative measures lately taken by the authorities concerned. True, some measure of discipline and control was lately discerned on some major roads and highways of the city through commissioning of army, navy and BDR personnel in traffic management.

But this cannot be a regular, normal feature for the relief of the ever-burgeoning traffic management problems. The main inhibiting factors appear to be the limited availability of the city's total road space, contrasting with the steady growth of the motorised transports. The spiralling ingress of slow-moving cycle rickshaws in ever-increasing numbers continues to be the road-users' worst nightmare.

A few more city's thoroughfares have lately been made out of bounds for such slow-moving contractions. But this seems to be a small measure of relief, considering that traffic congestion is now an all-time problem without any break or lean period in a day for almost all the city roads.

We have been hearing for a long time about some foreign-

aided ambitious projects for relieving the mounting congestion problems of the city by way of construction of by-passes, fly-overs and so on. Unless some of such projects are taken up on the ground and they make meaningful progress, they may all look like mere pipe-dreams to the city dwellers constantly bedevilled by the over-congested urban environment without any light at the end of the tunnel in the near future.

There was also some talk about creating satellite towns in close proximity to the Dhaka city. In this context, the Purabachal Housing Project received a lot of publicity. It is hoped in many that the project could play a helpful role in relieving the pressure of population within the city. But it seems that the project has been making such slow progress that there is hardly room for optimism about the project's expeditious completion.

Similarly, there is little optimism about expansion of the city across Buriganga. There is, of course, an on-going project for construction of a second bridge across Buriganga which is due for completion sometime next year. There is, however, no ground for hoping that the completion of the additional bridge will give a spurt to the expansion of the city southwards even in the private sector.

The private estate developers at present appear to be so busy pulling down low-rise buildings in some select areas of the city for constructing multi-storey structures in their places that they are not likely to find any incentive in taking up development work regarding satellite township schemes.

The absence of suitable housing schemes outside the city centre on the one hand, and the continuing spree of building multi-storey apartment buildings, on the other hand, have

been creating cumulative impact in heightening density of city population within existing limits with near-paralysing effect on utility service sectors, like gas, water and electricity. There is already a trend for movement of some sections of people who are more or less reasonably well-placed financially to the city like Uttara which are less congested with less air pollution yet enjoying normal facilities of urban life. The advantage of adequate transport system for that area, in some cases with premium AC bus service has added to the attraction for that area. This has also acted as a helpful factor for many business houses in shifting to that area.

Some recent travellers who went abroad cite the cases of Bangkok and Calcutta which previously suffered from serious traffic problems, but are now said to be enjoying a more disciplined traffic environment, thanks to innovative efforts of the civic bodies. Particularly in the case of Bangkok, due to construction of fly-overs in certain strategic areas. Judging from the results observed in such cities for relieving traffic congestion, our hope lies in the adoption of similar strategies as already envisaged in the foreign-aided projects for our city.

But the overriding need in the context of our horrendous problems, is speed in implementation of such projects. In the light of our signal success in implementing such a grandiose project as Bangabandhu bridge, there is room for optimism that given a determined will, the multi-faceted problems which are at present threatening the livability of the city may not be difficult for resolution.

The bottom line is that the city's mammoth problem of population congestion desperately cries for effective solution.

Power Purchase Indian team to visit Pakistan to work out technical details

BALLABGHARH, India, Nov 20: A seven-member Indian team will visit Islamabad next week to discuss technical details of the purchase of power from Pakistan, Power Minister PR Kumaramangalam said today, reports Reuters.

"The delegation's primary job is to work out the technical details," Kumaramangalam told reporters. "We are at the very preliminary stage of discussion."

Kumaramangalam was speaking after laying the foundation of the 400 kv sub-station at Samaipur village in Harayana state's Ballabgarh district, about 40 kms from New Delhi.

The team to Pakistan will be led by Pradeep Bajjal, a senior power ministry official.

An external affairs ministry statement in New Delhi said the discussions on the sale of power would be held from November 24 to 27.

It said officials from the two countries will meet from December 1 to 4 to discuss details about opening a bus service between Lahore and Delhi.



Prof Yunus gets Indira Gandhi Prize

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: Dr Mohammed Yunus, Chairman of Grameen Bank, has been selected for the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 1998, reports PTI.

The prize carrying 25 lakh rupees has been instituted in memory of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to foster creative cooperation among nations, ushering in of a new international economic order and enrichment of human spirit, Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust announced today.

The jury members who attended the meeting were former US Secretary of Defence Robert S McNamara, Vice Chancellor Emeritus of Cambridge University David Williams and Russian academician Il Marchuk. Among the prominent award winners are Mikhail Gorbachev, Sam Nujoma, Rajiv Gandhi, Vaclav Havel and Jimmy Carter.

Case against Benazir PPP challenges legality of Swiss authorities

ISLAMABAD, Nov 20: The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has filed a case in a Swiss court challenging the legality of Swiss authorities in assisting the Nawaz Sharif government in the alleged corruption cases against its chief Benazir Bhutto and her husband Asif Ali Zardari, reports PTI.

The petition, filed on Monday, alleged that the Swiss authorities, by getting involved in Pakistani politics, have done incalculable damage to the reputation of PPP and its leader, a release by the party said here today.

2 murdered

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out, he heard explosions and saw some people locked in a clash and others running in fear.

Some local people said they saw three persons lying with critical stab wounds near the stadium and another in front of the thana premises soon after the clash. Local people took three of them to a local clinic and later to DMCH where doctors declared one of them dead at about 8:30 pm, police and hospital sources said.

According to associates of the Rimon Aktar and Russel, the three, along with some of their friends, were enjoying the concert from around 3 pm.

At one stage Rimon, Russel and Aktar went out through gate No 5 at around 7:30 pm to collect food and drinks for their friends.

When the three were crossing the gate, they had an altercation with some other youths inside the stadium. There was no other untoward incident there. The three went outside but did not come back, their associates added.

The bodies were sent to DMCH morgue, hospital sources said. None was arrested or any case was filed with Mirpur thana in this connection till late last night.



Children at the dress-as-you-like session marking the founding anniversary of Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday. — Star photo

President tells SAFOG conference Reducing maternal mortality challenge for all of us

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday called for highest efforts to bring down maternal mortality, saying that it is a challenge for all of us, reports UNB.

"Why should a woman die in childbirth, a duty she performs for propagation of the human race? This question remains unanswered and unaddressed," he said inaugurating the 2nd conference of South Asian Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (SAFOG) in the afternoon.

"Motherhood-Safe for All by the 21st Century" is the theme of the three-day conference at Sonargaon Hotel.

President Shahabuddin said the condition of women's health is not good in Bangladesh, where some 22,000 women die every year because of complications in childbirth which "is by no means acceptable."

"I feel, it is our moral obligation to answer and address this issue of human misery," he said adding that the situation is no better in the other countries of this region.

The President said the governments in this region are no doubt doing their best to help the mothers and their infants, but the government alone cannot tackle these problems.

prohibiting dowry and protecting women from cruelty and violence. "But we need social support and change in attitude of our people to implement the laws effectively."

The President said medical care is always costly, but preventive measures are more affordable and beneficial.

"I would advise all of you to give more preventive medical care to our pregnant mothers and the new-borns to avoid risk of life," he told the conference. About 600 delegates, including 150 from 13 foreign countries, are attending the conference. The countries represented are: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, UK, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore, Indonesia, Sweden, Egypt and Germany.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Salah Uddin Yusuf addressed the conference as special guest while State Minister for Health Prof M Amanullah as the guest of honour.

Newly elected SAFOG president Prof T A Chowdhury, outgoing president Prof Rashid Latif Khan, Prof Shirish S Sheth, Prof Ratna S Samil, Prof Syeda Firoza Begum, Prof Shahla Khatun and Prof A B Bhuiyan also spoke at the inaugural session.

"It is a challenge for all of us to bring down maternal mortality, particularly of this region," he said.

The President said women in this region are victims of discrimination in many areas — they suffer from nutritional, social and even psychological deprivation from the very beginning.

"It is a human right issue and we must stop this gender bias. In spite of our small resources in the health sector, we should allocate high share in women's reproductive health infrastructure," he said.

"We should not penalise our mothers for no fault of their own in the process of childbirth."

He said community and stakeholders at every level have the responsibility to come forward to help the government in its efforts to reduce maternal deaths and long term complications following childbirth. Turning to violence against women, President Shahabuddin said it is "another shameful menace" prevailing in this region, which very much affects maternal health.

He said violence related to dowry is very common in this country, and the government has introduced stringent laws

PM attends milad at mazar premises of Bangabandhu

TUNGIPARA, Nov 20: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today attended a milad mahfil at the premises of the mazar of father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and expressed her gratitude to Almighty Allah for verdict in the Bangabandhu Murder Case, reports BSS.

Hundreds of people attended the milad mahfil and offered prayers seeking eternal peace of the departed soul of Bangabandhu.

Prayers were also offered for the peace, stability, progress and prosperity of the country and the people.

Leaders and workers of Awami League, Jubo League, Krishak League, Samik League, Shechchhasevak League, Mahila Awami League, Chhatra League also attended the milad.

The Prime Minister also offered *fateha* at the mazar after Juma prayers.

The prime minister left here for the capital in the afternoon.

BNP blasts govt for gas price-hike

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday blasted the government for increasing gas price by 15 per cent and demanded withdrawal of the decision, reports UNB.

Bhuiyan in a statement said the 15 per cent rise in gas price is part of the government's evil design of shifting the responsibility of its failure, incompetence, corruption, plundering and wastage of wealth to the people, he said.

Bhuiyan said gas price was increased in addition to tax burden at a time when public life became miserable due to a famine-like situation in the backdrop of flood, economic recession, unemployment and price spiral.

He said effort is also being made to increase the power tariff. He also criticised the government for increasing the price of fertiliser. "Their cruel fun has created a devastating situation," he added.

Sylhet Airport

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manding punishment to those responsible for the incident. The work stoppage which began at 12.00 pm was withdrawn after an hour with assurance from the police super.

The Station Manager of Civil Aviation was missing.

The customs and airport officials said that Collector of Customs and other officials had been informed of the matter. They vowed to resume work stoppage soon if legal measures against the culprits were not taken immediately.

However, president of Sylhet district BCL Shaiful Alam Nadel said none of the responsible office-bearers of the organisation was present at the VIP lounge. They alleged misbehaviour of the Airport Manager.

New subpoenas approved in impeachment inquiry

WASHINGTON, Nov 20: The House impeachment inquiry is moving beyond President Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky, after an opening hearing produced a heated clash between accuser Kenneth Starr and the president's personal lawyer, reports AP.

Independent Council Starr made a 12-hour nationally televised appearance before the committee Thursday, as it opened only the third presidential impeachment inquiry in US history. No president has been removed from office by the process.

Fencing with hostile Democrats and basking in Republican praise before engaging in a much-anticipated showdown with presidential attorney David Kendall, Starr was so much in the spotlight that the facts of his impeachment referral on the Lewinsky matter barely got a mention.

The House Judiciary Committee is expected to conduct several days of hearings before deciding whether to send articles of impeachment to the House floor. Republicans have only a narrow majority in the House. If they do recommend impeachment, the Senate would hold a trial on removal of the president from office.

Congress has impeached a president only once, Andrew Johnson in 1868. He was acquitted by one vote in the Senate and served out his term. President Richard Nixon resigned in 1974 rather than face

almost certain impeachment over the Watergate scandal.

Before exhausted lawmakers went home after midnight this morning, they met in closed session to extend to move the inquiry into the Kathleen Willey case and other matters. Mrs Willey has publicly accused Clinton of sexual misconduct with her in the White House but her allegations were not a part of Starr's report.

WASHINGTON, Nov 20: Former Senate Watergate Counsel Sam Dash abruptly resigned today as Kenneth Starr's ethics adviser to protest the independent counsel's decision to testify in the House impeachment hearing against President Clinton. "You have violated your obligations under the independent counsel statute and have unlawfully intruded on the power of impeachment," Dash said in a letter to Starr that was obtained by The Associated Press.

Majority Republicans approved subpoenas for Clinton's lawyer in the Paula Jones case, Robert Bennett, and two people connected with Mrs Willey. Committee officials announced that Clinton's closest aide, Bruce Lindsey, also would be subpoenaed. No vote was required, because Democrats did not object. All four will appear for sworn interviews in closed session, but it is not clear that they would testify at hearings. Clinton, travelling in Asia,

have been fulfilled. Even it did not implement the four-point agreement signed with the Opposition in Parliament, Karim quoted her as telling the diplomats.

During the one and half-an-hour meeting the BNP chief also told the diplomats that on November 16 the party's march towards parliament ended peacefully "since government goons or police did not attack it".

Those who met the BNP leader were the High Commissioners of India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Ambassadors of Norway, Switzerland, Iran, Thailand, Turkey, Russia, the Philippines, Charge d'Affaires of Indonesia, UAE, Kuwait and representative of IMF.

Norwegian ambassador described the meeting as "useful and informative". But he declined to say anything further to newsmen after the meeting.

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Dr Moeen Khan and Rezaul Karim assisted the BNP chief.

Khaleda tells diplomats

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he added. If the government allows BNP to carry out its peaceful and legitimate movements, meetings and processions, end killings and repression on opposition political activists, withdraw false cases and make parliament effective, there would not be any hurdle, she told the diplomats.

The party was compelled to call hartals and would do so in future unless the government permits the party to hold rallies and demonstrations and other peaceful activities, put an end to killings and repression on its workers, Karim said.

The present Prime Minister had said many things in the past and made pledges on many issues. Even in her election manifesto and speech she promised to repeal Special Powers Act and give autonomy to Radio and TV, separate the judiciary and the executive. But none of these pledges

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