

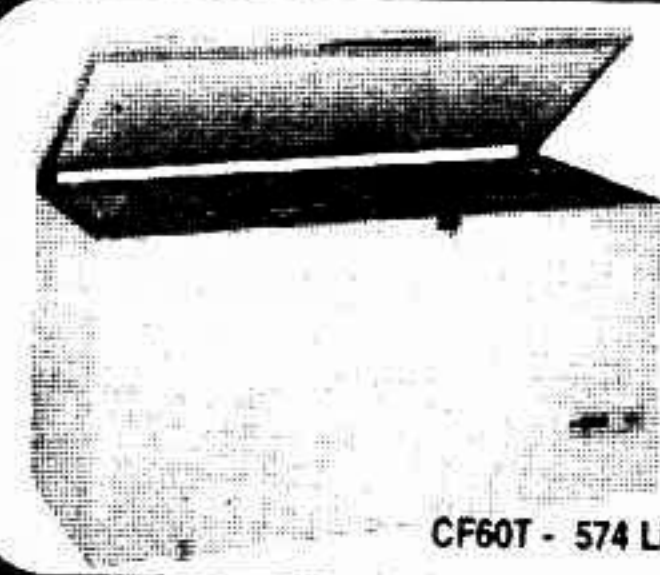
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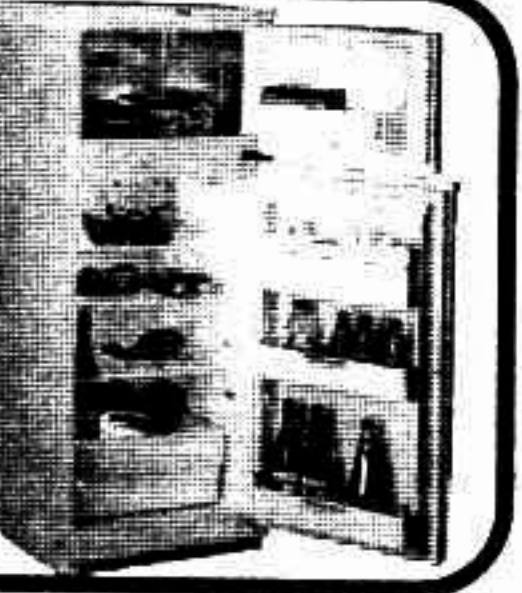


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# Down to Earth Pre-Eid nightmare of shopping and travel

By A S M Nurunnabi

The city-dwellers are at present passing through a nightmarish experience in matters of shopping and travels before Eid. As the big festival approaches, the nightmare gets intensified with the shopping spree surging towards the crescendo. The same phenomenon affects the travelling arrangements before Eid. In these respects, all considerations of discretion and judgement are thrown to the winds with a sort of desperation.

All the shops dealing in Eid requisites, be they located in showy important commercial zones or in less important areas, become packed with frenzied crowds of shoppers. Of course, the composition of such crowds of shoppers varies according to categories in social and economic strata to which they belong. The affluent classes of shoppers frequent the more elegant establishments, while the less so meet their requirements from the shops more modest, by comparison or from the sidewalk selling outlets.

One aspect of the nightmare lies more in the greater volume of customers on the city sidewalks. Since all of them, more or less, come under the sway of hawkers, it is a difficult exercise to get access to any shop standing by the sidewalk. When eventually one gets entry into any of them, which remains always overcrowded, he gets so perplexed that he fails to determine whether the price asked for an article is fair or not. In the frenzy of shopping, it may often turn out that what is given publicity as, discount price is actually more than the normal price and the customer goes for it without any question. In the midst of the maddening crowd, there is no scope for checking with a couple of shops nearby whether the asking price is really reasonable. The frenzy takes such a turn in

this situation that the overwhelming impulse that develops is to make the purchase, whatever be the price, and get out of the shop as early as possible.

The roadside hawkers selling some common items more in demand, such as punjabi, babywear, sandals, caps, etc. for the Eid, attract more people and they make the total shopping scenario more confusing and chaotic. One important factor in this context is that sometimes the hawkers sell their wares at prices lower than those charged at regular shops. Such concession in prices is sometimes found to reach a level which beats the legendary Bangabazar prices. The resultant attraction create greater number of customers and these bargain-hunters cause greater chaos with their pushing and jostling.

A striking contrast is sometimes presented by some elite shopping malls in posh areas like Gulshan, Baridhara and Banani, where women's apparels are reportedly sold at prices which may be considered as fantastic by ordinary standards. Yet there is no dearth of customers at these high-profile shops.

A dreadful spectacle is presented by the awful congestion created by the various modes of conveyances carrying passengers to their destinations for shopping. These include the stupendously high number of cars, micro-buses, autorickshaws and the locust-like swarms of rickshaws. In the pre-Eid time, such huge conglomeration of vehicles of all descriptions present such a harrowing sight that movement even on foot on every road in the city becomes a terrible ordeal. In such traffic chaos, travel by rickshaw becomes particularly hazardous, because in course of their slow move-

ment in a traffic jam, they tend to hit one another from behind. In case hitting gets a little hard for any of them, a passenger runs the risk of being thrown out his seat on to the ground with consequent injury. This is a constant danger for rickshaw passengers on the traffic-congested roads. In the pre-Eid period, such traffic congestion continues unabated from early morning till late at night.

Travels by trains, steamers or long-route buses are similarly awesome before the Eid. Quite some days ahead of the big festival, advance-booking of tickets for such journeys is so misused that a considerable part of such advance tickets go into the blackmarket whose operators dare to ply their illegal profit-making business unchallenged. Of course, there are isolated attempts at curbing this evil by the law-enforcing agencies. But, in fact, as the Eid gets nearer, the malpractice gets so widespread that controlling it doesn't prove to be an easy job.

Apart from that, there is the risk of overloading of passengers on trains, launches and buses. Such overloading in many cases becomes the cause of accidents, involving loss of lives. This phenomenon is always there on the eve of a big festival. Past experiences show that preventive measures in this regard have not proved adequate.

With a large part of the city's populace reduced on account of outward journeys of people for visiting their village homes, the city wears a contrasting look. On the day after the Eid, it is a pleasant experience going on a sleigh ride in a car or a rickshaw along the roads free of traffic jams. All the city dwellers who stay back welcome this short break in the usual pattern of hectic activity and high tension, contributing a watershed to our urban life.

## 50 tons of lead

dwelling on time-consuming 'minor' matters like whether to stop producing leaded fuel or not, sources concerned pointed out.

At present, the government is importing 92 RON (Research Octane Number) which has to be mixed with Tetraethyl Lead at the refinery to increase the anti-knock factor and to make it suitable for vehicles. Experts and officials revealed that 'only a little administrative action and import policy revision' for import of different grades of gasoline were needed to turn all our fuel lead-free.

They said if BPC starts importing 96 RON oil instead of 92 RON, there will be no need to mix lead with fuel at all. But BPC says in that case it will suffer a revenue loss because 96 RON is more expensive than 92 RON. However, the refinery people are said to be happy about 96 RON as they no longer have to spend for importing lead.

Officials also said the government is now under pressure to reduce fuel prices as the prices are low in the world market. If 96 RON crude is imported, the average cost of a litre of gasoline will have to be increased by about Tk 0.50.

## Vajpayee govt

lios of Information and Broadcasting and Communications) before taking over as Delhi Chief Minister in a last-ditch move by the BJP central leadership to boost the party's sagging image in the assembly polls in November last year.

And if Sushma Swaraj is to be accommodated in Vajpayee cabinet and restored to her earlier portfolios, Vajpayee will be forced to divest Promod Mahajan of the charge of Information and Broadcasting. Mahajan is considered a confidante of the Prime Minister.

This was the second time in three months that Vajpayee was forced to put off his ministry expansion. A similar exercise had to be deferred in October. Later, however, he carried out a limited expansion of his cabinet inducting Jaswant Singh as External Affairs Minister, Jagmohan as Communication Minister and Mahajan.

But Vajpayee, informed sources said, was likely to effect the ministry expansion and possibly portfolio reshuffle on January 27 just before the budget session of parliament in February seeking to put the seal of his assertiveness.

## Nepali parliament dissolved, fresh polls in May

KATHMANDU, Jan 15: Nepal's King Birendra today dissolved the parliament on the recommendation of the prime minister and announced fresh elections in May, state-run Radio Nepal reported, reports AP.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, leader of the Nepali Congress Party, won parliamentary vote of confidence Thursday, three weeks after forming a coalition government with the United Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Nepal and the Nepal Goodwill Party.

The three coalition partners had agreed to hold early elections before the present legislature's five-year term expires in November.

The King can dissolve the parliament only on the prime minister's advice. The new government will be responsible for holding fair elections and will not take any major policy decision while it is in power, Koirala said Thursday.

Elections in Nepal can be held only in spring or autumn. In winter, remote villages in the Himalayan region are inaccessible and during the monsoon, floods and landslides wash away roads and bridges.

Nepal's politics has been in turmoil since the 1994 election left no single party with a clear majority in parliament.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Cabinet colleagues attended an iftar party hosted by President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday. — PID photo

## Impeachment trial

From Page 1  
leys of a political battle got underway.

White House spokesman derided the case by the all-Republican prosecution team. Democratic senators said they had heard nothing new. Republicans praised the prosecutors' presentations.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott Chided Democrats in a written statement for commenting on the substance of the case — contented most Republicans followed his admonition to hold their political fire.

"What we heard today was nothing new," said first-year Sen. Charles Schumer, a Democrat, who had the unique circumstance of serving on the House Judiciary Committee as that panel built the impeachment case with sharp partisan divisions.

Earlier, before a jury of 100 silent senators, US House of Representatives prosecutors demanded Clinton's removal from office, charging he had 'piled perjury upon perjury' and obstructed justice.

Senate Republican leaders suggested Clinton might be invited to testify at his impeachment trial.

"I think he should be invited, or at least I don't have a problem with him being invited," Republican Whip Don Nickles told reporters after Thursday's session.

Republican sources said

Majority Leader Trent Lott had also expressed at least passing interest in the idea. Lott's office declined comment.

Inside the Senate Chamber, where monumental issues of war and peace have been thrashed out for over a century, the trial unfolded in an atmosphere of uncommon gravity.

"Failure to bring President Clinton to account... will cause a cancer for generations," asserted Wisconsin Republican James Sensenbrenner, standing in the well of the chamber of address the senators and a nationwide television audience counted in the millions.

Sergeant-at-Arms James Ziglar admonished all to remain silent "on pain of imprisonment."

Silent they were, the senators at their seats; those spectators lucky — or influential — enough to have space in the galleries above; the president's lawyers and House prosecutors seated around separate custom-made curved tables at the base of the rostrum and Rehquist, presiding in his judicial robe.

With the exception of two brief breaks, the trial remained in session until after dark as a string of House Republicans laid out their evidence. They buttressed their presentation with numerous images of Clinton on videotape, many of them of his testimony before independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's grand jury.

## President hosts iftar for PM and her cabinet

President Shahabuddin Ahmed hosted an iftar party for the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her cabinet colleagues at Bangabhaban yesterday evening, reports APB.

Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina and Ministers Abdus Samad Azad, Zillur Rahman, ASHK Sadek, Tofiq Ahmed, Mohammad Nuruddin Khan, Rafiqul Islam, Abdul Matin Khasru and Kalpa Ranjan Chakma attended the iftar party.

State Ministers Obaidul Quader, Moulana Nurul Islam, Alhaj Rashed Mosharrar, Prof M Amanullah, Prof Jinnatun Nessa Talukdar, and Deputy Minister Mohammad Hasibur Rahman Swapan were also present.

Besides, Political Adviser to Prime Minister Dr S A Malek, Agriculture Adviser Anisuzzaman and cabinet secretary Kazi Shamsul Alam also attended the iftar.

Earlier, President Shahabuddin Ahmed welcomed the Prime Minister and the ministers and exchanged pleasantries with them.

## Traders enforce hartal at Kurigram

KURIGRAM, Jan 15: Traders here enforced a half-day hartal in the town today protesting raids on their shops by anti-smuggling task force, reports UNB.

All the shops remained closed during the hartal. The businessmen also submitted a memorandum to DC demanding immediate halt to the drive.

The task force, comprised local administration, BDR, police and customs officials, in a drive seized Indian sugar and fertilizers from some shops of the town on Wednesday and Thursday.

When contacted, BDR sources said the raids were the part of a four-month anti-smuggling drive from December 20 last year.

## We're not afraid of opposition conspiracy, says PM

TUNGIPARA (Gopalganj), Jan 15: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today said that the opposition parties chose conspiracy as their shortcut path to power instead of following the democratic means as they didn't have confidence in the people.

"They have taken the path of conspiracy as they are thinking that they have no chance to go to power in democratic ways," she said while laying the foundation of Sheikh Russel Training and Rehabilitation Centre for the Distressed Children at Gimadanga in the morning.

A complex for the orphans and distressed children will be built at a cost of Tk 7.21 crore by June 2000. The institution will provide training, shelter,

and since then factional feud took a serious turn. There were similar incidents of bomb blasts in different places of the town in the last three days.

BNP district president Mujibur Rahman Sarwar, a local MP was not present at the iftar party.

However, in a press release issued later today by the acting general secretary Ebadul Haq Chand 'thanked all' for participating in the iftar party.

## Rivals foil

From Page 1  
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## CEC won't quit

From Page 1  
Refuting the opposition allegation, the CEC claimed that he was although non-partisan and neutral and conducted the elections, including the UP polls in a free, fair and peaceful manner.

He said the local bodies elections are not held under party banners and identity cards for the voters in such elections are not obligatory.

The project for issuing voters' ID cards will be completed by June, 1996 ahead of the next general elections scheduled for the year 2000 as announced by the Prime Minister.

## 52 pilgrims

From Page 1  
channel the flow of people snapped. Barefoot pilgrims were suddenly all over the hillside, some trying to sidestep electrical wires strewn in the area, and panic ensued, police said.

Part of the hilltop collapsed under the pressure. The deaths occurred in the stampede or by the cave-in itself, police said.

"There was panic all around, people were screaming, and most people died because they tried to rush down the hill," said R Vishvanath Pillai, a government official at the site, when reached by telephone from New Delhi.

The Star TV network said facilities at the shrine were inadequate to cope up with the rising number of pilgrims every year. It reported only 30 doctors were on hand care for half a million pilgrims.

Sabarimala is a deeply revered Hindu pilgrimage site. Tens of millions of pilgrims each year climb the 9-mile route up the mountain in traditional black robes to worship at its temple to the Hindu god Ayappa.

food and education to 300 children.

Training will be given on automobiles, welding, electricity, electronics, sewing, and other vocations to the children and later they will be helped in getting a suitable job to earn their livelihood.

Referring to the opposition politics, the Prime Minister said that many conspiracies were hatched against the government. "There are conspiracies and those would continue, but the ruling party has confidence in the people," she said.

"We are not afraid of any conspiracy as we have faith in the people and we are working only for the welfare of the people," she said at the function.

About the children, the prime minister said the government is determined to ensuring a bright future for them and taking all possible steps to ensure food, shelter, schooling and health for them.

"We want to build a happy world for the children where none will remain neglected, unfed," she said, calling on the affluent in the society to extend their hand of cooperation to the distressed and helpless children.

She said that the government had declared the first decade of the next century as the children rights decade.

Referring to the torture on children, the prime minister said the government is very much concerned about it and urged the people to remain soft and sympathetic to them at all levels.

She said that the government had taken measures to give education to all the children of the country and fixed a target to enroll 95 per cent of them in schools by the year 2002.

Earlier, disembarking from the helicopter the Prime Minister straight went to the mazar of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and offered tea.

## 8 killed

From Page 1  
from here collided with the truck at about 5:15 pm. Seven died on the spot and the other succumbed to his injuries on way to hospital.

The injured were admitted to Syedpur General Hospital and Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

BSS from Gazipur adds: Two people were killed and four others injured in a road accident today in Kamarpara area near Tongi on the Tongi-Ashulia road, police said.

They said the accident took place when a Tongi-bound truck hit an autorickshaw at around 4 pm, leaving two autorickshaw passengers dead on the spot.

The bodies were sent to the Gazipur Sadar Hospital for autopsies.

In Chittagong, one person was killed and four others were injured when a speeding bus hit an autorickshaw near Shah Amanat Bridge on the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar road today, police said.

The injured three of them in critical condition, were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

## Internet by BTTB

To provide public Internet Access Facility Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board has established a network at Moghbazar, Dhaka. The Internet Access of this network is being provided through Intelsat and it is directly connected to Canada. Using this network subscribers will be able to enjoy the following facilities:

- ◆ Backbone link speed of 128 Kbps which will be upgraded to a higher speed with the increase of number of subscribers.
- ◆ Supports World Wide Web, Electronic Mail, File Transfer Protocol and Telnet Services.
- ◆ Also supports user end services like Internet Relay Chat, Gopher Archie and others.
- ◆ Forty telephone access with hunting facilities. Accessibility will be increased on demand.
- ◆ Higher access speed due to higher "Bandwidth-Subscriber Ratio."
- ◆ As most of the Web sites are in United States and other nearby countries subscribers will enjoy higher speed in browsing those web pages using our network.

The charges for using the Internet Services are given below:

Subscriber Type	Installation Charge	Operating Charge	
		Time	Usage Rate Per Minute
Dial-Up	2000/- (One Time)	06.00-22.00	1.00
		22.00-06.00	0.50

Subscribers will have to arrange the user and equipment such as: Computer and Modem at their own cost. The Internet connection may be provided with subscriber's existing BTTB telephone connection.

Moreover, BTTB is soon going to extend Internet Access facility to Chittagong, Khulna, Bogra & Sylhet. Subscribers, interested to enjoy Internet Services, are requested to apply in prescribed form to be collected from the office of the General Manager, Overseas Telecom Region, Korail, Banani, Dhaka. Tel: 9871196.



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Preparations underway to hold the main Eid congregation at the National Eidgah on the High Court premises in city. Picture shows bamboo structures being made to erect pandals. — Star photo