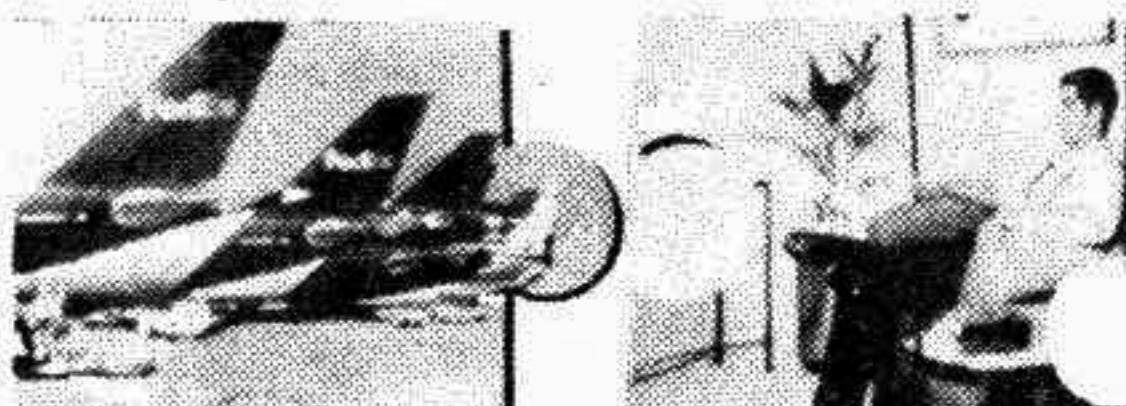


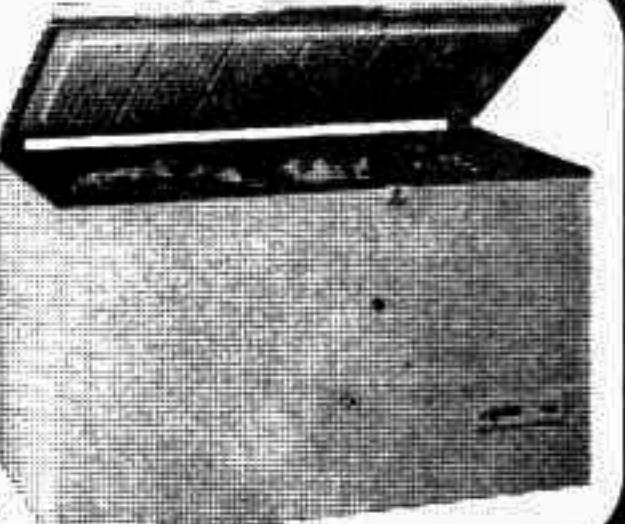
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## Down to Earth

### Any Silver Lining in the Growing Darkness of Traffic Chaos?

By ASM Nurunnabi

There is a glimpse of silver lining in the widening gloom of traffic turmoil when there has been a recent report that a total outlay of Tk 1,000 crore is fixed for implementing a co-ordinated project for easing the traffic medley in the metropolis. This project is to be implemented by Dhaka City Corporation, RAJUK, Roads and Highways Department and seven other government agencies. The project is due for submission to the ECNEC soon for approval.

The project covers a long time-span beginning from 1998-99 to 2002-2009, incorporating both short-term and long-term plan components. There is greater interest and concern in respect of the short-term plan objectives for the obvious reason that the population of the metropolis has been increasing at a galloping speed.

On the basis of the statistics for 1997, it is estimated that the city population will increase to 10 million in the year 2000. Keeping in view the objectives of the short-term plans, which in their essentials include the construction of two fly-overs, one at Mohakhali and the other at Jatrabari; construction of 10 bypass roads in the city to facilitate the movement of inter-district transports; improvement of 20 road junctions and provision of parking facilities in three important areas, the most vital question seems to be whether these projected benefits will be available within the time-frame fixed for construction of such facilities, subject to the availability of required funds.

In the light of existing realities, there may be little scope for attaining optimistic results. It is quite apparent that while the planned facilities will be under execution, the growth of the city population will continue apace with concomitant shortfalls in provisions of basic infrastructural needs.

The city dwellers are already experiencing nightmarish traffic

congestion, as a result of which tens of thousands are regularly trapped at various points throughout the day, unsure of when they would be able to extricate themselves from the frightening traffic mess. At times on certain roads stranded vehicles of all descriptions stand in long queues for long periods and then it may appear that the whole system has collapsed.

No one can deny that what they say is true, but there are other important factors. Rickshaws, the most maligned vehicles of all, are a nuisance, a necessary evil. Plans have been made to phase them out, but to be realistic they will never be implemented, at least in the foreseeable future. They provide employment to about half a million of people in Dhaka city alone. They also carry 45% of the total passengers in the city. We will have to live with them until we achieve a more or less respectable standard of living.

What with new faces of rickshaw pullers now numbering into lakhs, what with impatient motorists, wayward autorickshaw drivers, and queues of buses and trucks outmaneuvering their turnings ahead of others at road-crossings, it takes hours to negotiate one's way through such traffic medleys. Late, to cope with congestion on north-south routes including the VIP route reserved for motorised traffic, the authorities decided to dispense with traffic light signals and reverted to manual direction of traffic with increased policemen at road crossings, releasing east-west cross traffic only when it gathered visibly to a point of saturation. The result has been transfer of congestion to other related points that remain unregulated.

The problem worsens day by day. Things have come to such a pass that even the most phlegmatic of our citizens have begun deplored the delays caused by the overwhelming congestion. Traffic has become the topic of the day, even more so than the anomalous weather or the political shenanigans that keep the media busy.

What is surprising is that few have been able to pinpoint the root cause for traffic snarls. They blame the proliferation of very ominous consequences.

United Nations, Mar 12: Outlawed Sarbaraha Party shot dead a young man and injured another two, including a union parishad member, in Chowgachha thana of the district on Thursday night, reports UNB.

The dead, Rintu, 22, was an activist of Sramajibi Mukti Andolok and son of Shafi Sarder of Syedupur village in Fulchhara union.

Police said an armed group of about 25 people, suspected to be members of outlawed Sarbaraha Party, first raided the houses of UP member Mahabub and Zoinur, and beat them up mercilessly.

Later, the group kidnapped their cousin Rintu from his house at about 8:30 pm and killed him at a nearby field before leaving the area.

A land dispute was believed to be the cause of the murder.

Police arrested one Sirajul for his alleged involvement in the incident.

### Opposition starts 7-day agitation programmes in Ctg today

CHITTAGONG, Mar 12: Opposition parties here today announced a week-long agitation programmes against the government for its "failure" to check terrorism in the district, reports UNB.

The announcement came from a news conference of the local chapter of the BNP-led opposition.

The programmes, beginning tomorrow, include rallies, silent procession, mass-contact and a token hunger strike.

Metropolitan BNP President Meen Mohammad Nasiruddin, Secretary Dastagir Chowdhury, President of Metropolitan Jatiya Party Mahmudul Islam Chowdhury and Jamaat-e-Ameer Principal Mowlana Abu Taher were present at the press conference.

### One shot dead by outlaws in Jessore

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### East Timor: Ballot on autonomy package agreed

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 12: Indonesia and Portugal reached agreement Thursday on a direct ballot on a direct autonomy package for East Timor, seen as paving the way towards independence, UN chief Kofi Annan announced, reports AFP.

Annan made the announcement at a news conference winding up two days of talks with the Portuguese and Indonesian foreign ministers on the future status of the former Portuguese colony.

"On the means of consulting the East Timorese, which I know is of great interest to you, the meeting has reached an agreement that a method of direct ballot will be used to ask the people of East Timor whether they accept or reject the autonomy proposal," Annan said.

Details on page 5

### Khaleda

From Page 1

Barkatullah Bhuloi MP, Giasuddin Qader Chowdhury MP and some other central leaders will accompany the BNP Chairperson.

The BNP chief will hold a series of mass contact programmes this month. She will leave Dhaka for Bagerhat and Satkhira on March 19 on a two-day visit.

Begum Zia will address a public meeting at Paltan Maidan on March 22. She will also address public meetings in all the nine constituencies of the city.

The decision to boycott the programme has been taken as police authorities did not issue any security pass for the journalists.

CU convocation

From Page 1

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