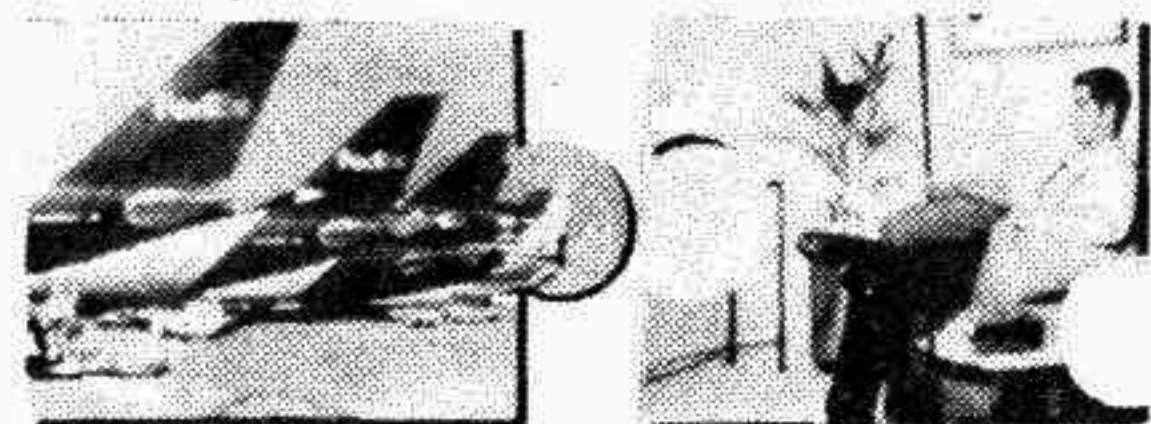


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## Down to Earth

## 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 traf-

fic 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 traffic comprising hundreds of vehicles of all descriptions stand in long queues for long periods and then it may appear that the whole system has collapsed.

The city's traffic is bad enough even in normal times. On special occasions when the city is hosting an important international or regional conference, a sports event or on the eve of big festivals, it goes worse.

What with new faces of rickshaws, 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. Lately, 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 deploring 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

baby taxis and tempos, the steadily increasing number of rickshaws and burgeoning imports of used cars from Japan. They point out Dhaka city has only about 2000 km of roads, whereas it should have at least 8000 km. They also blame the ill-planned layout of streets and the number of intersections which have to cope with traffic from five roads or more.

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.

The baby taxis and tempos are also a nuisance and a danger. They weave in and out of traffic without the least regard for normal precautions or elementary road rules. They are also, because of their two-stroke engines, the greatest polluters of air; if any vehicles have to be phased out they should be first. Govt have reportedly given a deadline for phasing them out.

Another problem that ought to be immediately taken care of is the invasion of footpaths by all sorts of encroachments and other traffic offences including dumping of construction materials and unauthorised structures that push pedestrians on to the smoother passages of traffic lanes.

The bottom line is that if the proposed project for easing the gigantic traffic problems of the metropolis, at least with its short-term goals, is not executed and completed with all expedition, the issue of liveability in this place will present very ominous consequences.

## 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 at the local press club.

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

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

## One shot dead by outlaws in Jessore

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

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

Police said an armed group of about 25 people, suspected to be members of outlawed Sarbahara 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.

## East Timor: Ballot on autonomy package agreed

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 12: Indonesia and Portugal reached agreement Thursday on a 'direct ballot' on a draft 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.

## Khaleda

From Page 1  
Barkatullah Bhulu MP, Gladusdin 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.



Actor Bulbul Ahmed (2nd left) handed over the Best Film Actress Award of the Meril-Prothom Alo Best Stars Survey '99 to recipient Shabnoor, (1st left) at a ceremony in the city yesterday. At right are TV stars Afzal Hossain and Shuborna Mustafa, the announcers at the ceremony.

—Star photo

## Jessore: Arrested Monirul says

From Page 1  
"I am an asami (accused), that's why they did this to me," Hasan said.

The CID said they seized some cassettes spiced with sounds of machineguns and laced with urgings from a strong voice which said, "The bloody way of sacrifice is the only path the faithful could trod to establish the views." The CID also recovered some books like "Seen Allah in Afghanistan", a *kaffeyah* (Arabic head gear), some Arabic scripted notes in an old diary and a photo album of Taliban in action in Afghanistan, they said.

Police raided the house of Monirul Hasan at Vayana village under the Sadar thana this evening but they could not find his wife Selina Hasan.

Police suspected that she fled to her parents' home in India. Her family lives in Munjilhatti village under Degana thana under 24 Pargana in West Bengal.

A neighbouring cloth merchant at the Chhati Amtala Bazar, Selim Hossain, said they were surprised at Hasan's arrest. He was an *imam* at a local mosque, leading prayers five times a day but he did not deliver any political message during the *Khutba* (sermons before Friday prayer).

"Sometimes he played Islamic songs, opinions and Sayde's sermons. Sometimes he went to the Pir Charmonal. He married while he was a student in Deoband in India. The bride is from West Bungal, whose brother was his classmate. He has been in cloth business since he came back 10-12 years ago. After Eid he decided to close that, switching to farm tools trade. Police came and took him away saying he had a gun," Selim said.

A neighbour, 88-year-old Rafi Uddin said, "He (Hasan) was a good chap. Did not know anything about gun toting or

## CU convocation

From Page 1  
Tight security measures have been taken and extra police, BDR, DB, CID, personnel deployed on the Campus to ensure the smooth holding of the convocation.

UNB adds: A joint meeting of Chittagong Union of Journalists (CUJ) and Chittagong Press Club tonight decided not to cover the Prime Minister's programme at the Chittagong University.

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

preaching Harkat ideals". "How did you get in touch with Harkat?" When this correspondent asked Hasan, he said he was not that active but only collected some money. Those were sent twice to Multi Abdul Hye, Editor of Jago Mujahid.

"Who is heading it now?" After a pause, he replied in the negative. The money, 2000 or so, was sent thrice --first to Hye then to one Abdus Salam, he said.

"Did you join Jihad in Afghanistan?" he was asked. "No. I had a friend, Nurul Kabir, from Jessore, as a mate in Deoband. He died in Afghanistan in 1991."

Police said they also arrested his elder brother, Sirajul Hasan, a contractor, who came to enquire about him. He was arrested under Section 54 because "he came for the second time despite order from 'sirs' not to come again", said an official.

## Another Jessore victim dies

By Staff Correspondent  
Ratan Biswas, 23, a victim of Sunday's bomb explosions in Jessore, succumbed to his injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday night.

A doctor informed The Daily Star over phone that Ratan Biswas, son of Dulal Biswas died at 11.55 pm. He was injured with several splinters and was admitted to the DMCH on March 9.

With Ratan's death, the toll from the Jessore Udichi bombing rose to nine.

But who founded Harkat in Bangladesh? Is not it Abdur Rahman Faruqi who was also at Deoband during 1980's?

"Yes, he was senior to me. He died in Afghanistan. The Harkat surfaced in 1989". That was all he would say, leaving many questions unanswered.

At the verandah of Jessore Collectorate Hajat, he was preparing for an overnight stay in jail.

But until 8-00 PM, it was not clear if he would be placed on remand for 7 days, sought by CID.

Police said they also arrested his elder brother, Sirajul Hasan, a contractor, who came to enquire about him. He was arrested under Section 54 because "he came for the second time despite order from 'sirs' not to come again", said an official.

## US Senate votes against unilateral declaration of Palestinian state

WASHINGTON, Mar 12: The US Senate voted 98 to 1 Thursday to oppose any unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state by Yasser Arafat and urged the Clinton administration to be stronger in its opposition, reports AP.

The resolution calls for assurances from President Bill Clinton that a declared Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, would not be recognised by the United States.

The House is expected to vote on a similar resolution next week, even though some lawmakers' concerns that it could be seen as an attempt to interfere in Israel's May 17 general election prompted the House International Relations Committee to delay a vote on it Wednesday.

Statehood and all other outstanding issues relating to the Palestinians' permanent status must be negotiated by Israel and the Palestinians to avoid more bloodshed, said Sen. Sam Brownback.

This resolution sends an unambiguous statement to Chairman Arafat

## Road accident

From Page 1

Police said the dead could not be identified immediately. Police seized both the vehicles and lodged a case with Chandina thana in this connection.

In Jessore, two women were killed and 20 others injured, six critically, when a bus carrying a bridal party skidded off the road and fell into a roadside ditch at Barabazar Fulbari gate in Kaliganj thana last night.

Hospital sources said the driver of the bus lost control over the vehicle while giving side to a microbus coming from opposite direction at about 7.45 pm.

The bridal party was going to village Khetrapala in Bagharpara thana from village Piroipur in Kaliganj thana.

Hazari Bala, 80, widow of late Shema Charan, and Raju Bala, 70, wife of Hazari Lal of Piroipur, died on the spot. All the victims hailed from the same village.

The critically injured persons were rushed to Jessore General Hospital.

## Dacoity

From Page 1  
The gang snatched the key of the almira from the owner of the house, MA Mannan and looted 35 ounces of gold ornaments, diamond ring and other valuables worth about Tk five lakh.

A case was filed with Hazariabagh thana in this connection.

## Burn injury

From Page 1  
M M Reza told Dr Ronald during a meeting that construction of the proposed burn unit would be given priority in the current five-year Health and Population Sector Programme (HPSP).

Dr John Morrison, Coordinator of the Project for Helping Survivors of Acid Violence, and two senior DMCH plastic surgeons accompanied Dr. Hiles during the meeting.

The UNICEF-aided project will provide funds for treatment of acid burn patients and for a campaign to create social awareness for prevention of such incidents in the country.

Last year, about 2000 women and children victims of burn injury, majority of them poor, were admitted to the DMCH. There is no bed for male patients. Around 4000 patients are in the waiting list till October 2001.

Because it is highly expensive, treatment facility at private clinics has not grown. A burn injury patient requires five to ten operations which cost five to seven lakh taka. There are two centres in the city which treat a limited number of patients.

## Banani Lake

From Page 1  
had been taken over by one Akhtaruzzaman Babu. He said he had been told that after filling up the lake, the land would be used for creating a slum for 'poor people' of the area. The slum dwellers of Kuril across the lake are, therefore, supporting Babu, he added.

Along the lake up to Kemal Ataturk Avenue, traces of fresh earth-fillings are evident. At several spots, trucks were seen dumping earth into the water. At Road-35, where a new slum is emerging on a recently filled area, dwellers said this part was filled during the last Ramadan.

Serajul Islam of the slum said as soon as Rajuk completed the earth-filling, they were asked by a 'bara bhai' (elder brother) to come here and start living. Islam showed several signboards and said those were not put by actual owners of the land. Several women from the slum said one Engineer Zaman of Rajuk came by a motorbike recently and asked them who had put the signboards. The women quoted Zaman as saying that Rajuk was yet to allocate plots in that area.



Army black commandos using dog squad, carrying out a security check at the VIP Gallery at Bangabandhu Stadium before the start of the Asian Test Championship Final yesterday.

—Star photo

## Yehudi Menuhin

From Page 1

He started playing the violin at the age of five and gave his first concert one year later. At the age of seven, he appeared with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in Lalo's Spanish Symphony. The English composer Edward Elgar called him "the most wonderful artist I have ever heard."

At 10, he was playing in New York's Carnegie Hall. In 1929, he appeared in Germany with Bruno Walter and the Berlin Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic and played his virtuosity in the concert of Beethoven, Brahms and Johann Sebastian Bach.

His first world tour in 1930, he played in 63 cities. Some of them would later make him citizen of honour, while governments and musical academies showered other awards upon him.

During his long career, Menuhin gave countless concerts around the world, although recently he devoted more of his time to teaching and conducting.

He also made numerous recordings, published several memoirs, such as his passionate 1977 autobiography "unfinished journey," and made documentary music films in Europe and America.

## Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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## Pakistan restrict SL

From Page 1

for Sri Lanka when Shoaib Akhtar knocked down the off-stump of Arnold in the next over, leaving the islanders tottering at 19 for three. Shoaib, the hero of the Calcutta Test where the young tearaway took eight wickets against India, appeared well charged-up in his first encounter with Sri Lanka after being rested during the Lahore Test.

The 24-year-old fast bowler from Lahore, who took the cricketers' fraternity by storm after his famous act in Calcutta where he bowled Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar in successive deliveries, came firing all his four cylinders much to the delight of a handsome Dhaka crowd. Although he finished with two wickets, Shoaib once again showed how quick he was with some express deliveries.

The creditable performance of the Pakistan bowlers could not deny Sri Lanka's Aravinda de Silva the kudos because the master batsman stood among the ruins with a watchful 72 off 164 balls. It was his 19th half-century. Coming in to bat at number five, the experienced right-hander put on 65 runs for the fourth wicket with Atapattu, who became the last batsman

out before lunch after scoring 36 with the help of five fours including an exquisite bowler's back drive against Akram.

Atapattu paid the penalty for playing across off-spinner Saqlain. But Aravinda was full of concentration. In his 82-minute vigil at the crease Aravinda hammered ten sweetly-aimed hits across the rope before becoming the eighth batsman to be out just after the tea break. He was adjudged leg-before after a failed attempt to sweep Arshad.

When Aravinda was out at 201, Sri Lanka were still 24 runs short of their second bonus point. Sri Lanka's hopes of getting that bonus point looked bleak when they lost their ninth wicket eight runs later. But thanks to a defiant unbeaten 20 from Chaminda Vaas, the islanders got their second bonus point. Pakistan, on the other hand, earned the maximum four bowling bonus points.

Nevertheless, Vaas must have ended the day with a heavy heart despite his valiant effort with the willow as the left-arm seamer was deprived of a wicket in his come-back match after being sidelined during the Lahore Test due to injury.

Saeed Anwar, on five, offered a simple catch at second slip, which Arnold failed to grab much to the horror of an increasingly wearied Sri Lankan side that had haplessly watched as many as five catches being dropped at Lahore.

The match resumes this morning at 9.30 am.

Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury was introduced to the players of both the finalists before the match.