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Down to Earth

Dream of Low-cost Housing in City Suburbs

By A S M Nurunnabi

The population and other infrastructural aspects of Dhaka metropolis have been bloating to such an extent that it may be bursting at the seams. The vastly expanding process has now assumed awesome aspects so much so that the livability of the city seems to be at stake. Other alarming aspects of the city's population explosion relate to the narrowing of efficiencies mainly in such sectors as transport and communication, water and energy supply and housing.

in respect of the project, there seems to be hardly any room for optimism about the project's expeditious completion.

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

The absence of suitable housing schemes with emphasis on low-cost housing in city suburbs on the one hand and the continuing spree for building multi-storey apartment buildings, on the other hand, has been creating cumulative impact in heightening density of city population within existing limits with near paralysing effect on utility service sectors.

A recent newspaper report said that a leading international housing company based in Singapore has shown keen interest in setting up a satellite town in the port city of Chittagong by investing about 200 million US dollars in joint collaboration with a Bangladeshi company. A memorandum of understanding to this effect is due for signing between the two companies.

It is said that the Singapore-based housing company has invested in housing projects in about 20 countries including Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan and some Pacific countries.

Observers hope that if similar joint housing projects in collaboration with private sector can be taken up in Dhaka city suburbs it may play useful role in easing population pressure within the city. In the opinion of many observers a large scope exists for expansion of the Dhaka city across Burganga. Besides the existing China Friendship Bridge linking the two areas, there is an on-going project for construction of a second bridge across Burganga which is due for completion in the near future.

To many there is ground for hoping that the completion of the additional bridge may give a spurt to the expansion of the city southwards if the private sector takes interest in this kind of projects. Low-cost housing being a global concern, innovation elsewhere needs to be studied, and if found suitable, incorporated in our housing schemes.

Sri Lanka has reportedly succeeded in coping with the problem of housing for low-income groups by going in for a long-term plan. Indian experience with low-cost housing reportedly has also yielded positive results. Since most of the developing societies in the world are now concentrating on creation of accommodation facilities for the citizens at a reasonable cost, we may advance the cause of egalitarianism if we can manage to follow in their footsteps to ameliorate the condition of the low-income groups with assistance from all possible quarters.

There are pessimists who say that since 1995, we have seen a mixed bag of government promises and pledges were made but few were delivered. About establishment of satellite townships in city suburbs, where land rates may not be as high as those prevailing within the city, observers believe that there is a good scope for the private sector to invest in low-cost housing projects.

Lately one prominent private building firm has placed an advertisement in some daily newspapers with a plan for pure two-room accommodation within an area of half a katha with construction cost not exceeding one lakh twenty-five thousand taka. If such a model of low-cost house, with provision of making additions, if necessary, gets publicity and is popularised, it may make a singular contribution to the easing of housing needs at affordable cost for low-income groups.



US infantry soldiers arrive at the American base in Petrovac near Skopje on Thursday after being airlifted from neighbouring Albania by Chinook and Blackhawk helicopters. The first 1,500 US Army soldiers will join the NATO peacekeeping force for Kosovo (KFOR). — AFP photo

Golden jubilee

Hasina to open programme at Barisal today

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, June 11: The golden jubilee of Bangladesh Awami League will be celebrated here tomorrow.

Prime Minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the programme at Bangabandhu Udayan in the city.

Organisers said 50 elderly Awami League leaders from six southern districts of Barisal division will be accorded reception in recognition of their contribution to the party in the past 50 years.

More than one lakh Awami League leaders, workers and delegates are likely to join the celebration from Barisal and neighbouring districts of Jhalakati, Bhola, Pirojpur, Patuakhali and Barguna, organisers said.

The Prime Minister will also open Bangladesh Betar Barisal Centre at 10 am tomorrow.

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A way of life

A view from the Gully

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This encounter between the two top favourites is of some consequence for the Proteas in as much as their choice of an opponent in the semifinals. If Australia win they will have six points on the top with South Africa and if Pakistan win against Zimbabwe Friday they will also have six points. So the run rate and related rules will come into play to decide the top three teams in the Super Six. If New Zealand win against India today and South Africa win against Australia and Zimbabwe defeat Pakistan the scenario will be different. And if India beat New Zealand, Zimbabwe beat Pakistan and South Africa win against Australia there will be some other calculations. So these matches are of vital importance to all the six teams as far as semifinal slots are concerned. Since Zimbabwe are almost certain for the semifinals all three other teams would like to play against them instead of meeting a stronger opponent at that stage.

Nathan Asstle, Mathew Horne, McMillan and Chris Cairns but they did not oblige. They were nowhere near their normal self nor they were allowed any liberties by Donald, Pollock and Kallis. In desperation they threw about their bat and perished. Unless they can win against India today they might as well take a flight back home.

Bus dacoity

in Demra

By Staff Correspondent

Robbers took away cash money and valuables from bus passengers at gunpoint at Kutubkhali under Demra thana in the city yesterday afternoon.

According to police, a group of armed dacoits were travelling aboard a Dhaka bound passenger bus from Chandpur in guise of passengers. When the bus arrived at Kutubkhali at about 1 pm, the gang swooped on the passengers and looted Tk 11 thousand in cash and other valuables at gunpoint.

They then got down from the bus and made away. The passengers reported the incident to Demra thana soon after the incident.

Police seized the vehicle and arrested its driver Rob and helper Rashid for their alleged involvement in the robbery.

Alleged killer of

Indian national arrested in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, June 11: Police today arrested one Zakir Hossain in connection with the killing of Indian national Jibrán Tayabi, police said, reports BSS.

Zakir, 31, son of Jafar Ahmed of Goshaidanga under Douleemoring thana was arrested from the Agrabad area of the city, they said.

Jibrán Tayabi, representative of a shipping line, Sen-trance Maritime Bangladesh Limited, was shot dead on Wednesday.

Mixed reaction on budget

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an important role in industrialisation. The provision for advance tax deduction on repayment will inhibit investment in this very important sector.

It appreciated the emphasis on education, human resource development, poverty alleviation and primary healthcare. Awareness of the government about some crucial matters such as smuggling, protection of environment and safety net for disadvantaged people are praiseworthy.

Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) welcomed the proposed budget as 'pro-people' and said it will help development of local industries.

In a joint statement, its president and vice-president hailed different measures including the Tk 100 crore subsidy on fertiliser, allowing tax free import of TSP fertiliser and reduction of duty on power tiller.

Reduction of duties on raw materials for ceramics and melamine and cash incentives for export of leather products and artificial flower will help growth of these industries.

PSI may not be effective as it may be misused, BCI said.

Restaurant Owners

Bangladesh Restaurant Owners Association has urged the government to withdraw VAT on small hotels and restaurants. Otherwise, members of the association will go for street agitation, its President Khandaker Ruhul Amin said in a statement.

He suggested withdrawal of VAT on small hotels and restaurants since wage earners take food there at cheaper prices.

Field level tax officials will take advantage and harass the small hotel owners, he said.

Instead of expanding the VAT net, the government can introduce 'capacity tax' on small enterprises including restaurants, Amin said.

CAB

The Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) said the new budget will increase the cost of living.

It will not protect the interest of the commonman. The expanded tax net will ultimately hit the lower income groups, it said.

Dr. Devapriyo Bhattacharya

Dr Devapriyo Bhattacharya of BIDS when contacted said the budget could not provide the required vision for taking the country into the next millennium.

He further pointed out that the new budget failed to provide enough analysis of foreign investment in the gas and energy sector.

It also lacked proper policy measures for rejuvenating of capital market, he said.

Devapriyo said it will be interesting to observe how the government will implement the proposed package of public expenditure without resorting to further borrowing from the banking sector.

Dr Wahiduddin

When contacted, Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud, former finance adviser in the caretaker government, said on Thursday that he would give his reaction after a few days as he was yet to read the contents of the budget properly.

Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman

Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, Senior Research Fellow of BIDS, observed, "Our economy has developed a capacity to recover from floods and natural disasters because of the resilience of farmers and marginal producers. But how much it has been translated into real income has not been looked into in the budget."

He also said it is a general weakness that the poverty issue has not been addressed comprehensively.

The incentive packages in the budget is more directed towards the upper group and the poor does not figure in the safety net.

"We have to see the control of revenue expenditure. Direct allocation to the Local Government sector has not marked any significant increase. Government mainly concentrated on fiscal incentives but equally important are access to credit and institutional environment. The benefits being given need also to be passed on to the consumers. For example, hospitals in private sector given tax break upto 2005 must have built in benefits to be passed on to the consumer, he said.

Dr Zillur observed that need-less controversy on growth rate should be avoided.

Dr B Sen

Dr. Binayek Sen of BIDS declined to give any instant reaction saying that BIDS would give its considered opinion later through an open discussion.

Twelve senior research fellows of the BIDS would be present at the discussion meeting scheduled to be held on June 17 at the BIDS auditorium, he told The Daily Star.

Tax Lawyers

Bangladesh Tax Lawyers Association said the proposed budget is a milestone. It is a pro-people and development budget. It has simplified the self-assessment system regarding income tax.

Shibir-BCL clash at CU: 50 injured

CHITTAGONG, June 11: At least 50 people were injured in a fierce clash between supporters of two student groups at the Chittagong University today, reports UNB.

Some 40 rooms of Shah Amanat Hall and Suhrawardy Hall were ransacked and three teachers assaulted during the clash between pro-Awami League Chhatra League and Islamic Chhatra Shibir, the student front of Jamaat-e-Islami.

Police and witnesses said the clash erupted at about 3.30 pm when BCL and Shibir activists began exchange of fire following an altercation between activists of the two groups.

Shibir activists allegedly beat up two BCL supporters at one stage of their altercation.

Police arrived on the campus an hour later and resorted to lathi-charge to disperse the clashing groups. About 40 people were injured in the lathi-charge.

They also raided Shah Amanat Hall, Suhrawardy Hall and AF Rahman Hall. It could not be known whether they arrested anyone or seized any arms from the halls.

Call off hartal, Kibria urges opposition

Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria yesterday urged the opposition political parties to call off tomorrow's hartal as he finds no reason for the protest, reports UNB.

The BNP-led opposition alliance has called the nationwide dawn-to-dusk shutdown to protest the proposed 1999-2000 budget that they say is anti-people.

"They [opposition] had carried out destructive politics for the last few months but had returned to the right track after realising that the programmes were counterproductive," he told newsmen at post-budget press conference at NEC auditorium.

But, he added, now they are again reverting to the path of destructive politics.

BGMEA, 4 other business assoc urge opposition to call off hartal

Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and four other business forums yesterday urged the opposition to call off its hartal scheduled for tomorrow saying that such political programme would bring about disaster for the export oriented industries struggling to overcome the effects of last year's devastating floods, reports BSS.

BGMEA President Anisur Rahman Sinha, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association President Manjurul Haq, Bangladesh Textile Mills Association Chief Salman F Rahman, Bangladesh Specialised Textiles and Power Loom Association Chief Shahjada Mia and Bangladesh Terri Towel and Linen Mills Association Chief Shaiful Islam in a joint statement urged the government and the opposition to settle their differences through talks instead of disrupting the country's economic activities.

EPB to introduce electronic visa information system

By Rafiq Hasan

An Electronic Visa Information System (ELVIS) is going to be introduced soon at the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) to prevent forgery in export visa and quota document in garments export to the US.

Sources in the commerce ministry said the government has requested the US customs for participation in the ELVIS which is being used by ten other countries exporting garments to the US.

The US customs has given four conditions for participation in the system and the government has agreed to those. The conditions include computerisation of the EPB, a centralised system of issuing visa, selection of a 'carrier' or service provider for conducting the job on behalf of EPB and training of manpower by the US customs.

The sources said that the government has taken necessary steps to fulfil all the conditions to introduce the system soon. The process of computerisation of EPB is going on and will be completed very soon.

The EP floated a tender to select the service provider. Three companies responded but the technical evaluation committee

comprising computer experts found none of these capable of doing the job. A high level meeting at the EPB on Wednesday decided to go for a re-tender, the source said.

Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) President Anisur Rahman Sinha, two other BGMEA leaders Engineer Taher and Engineer Kalam, Head of the Computer Science and Technology Department at BUET and representatives from the Computer Council were present at the meeting.

Meeting sources said the BGMEA is considering submitting a fresh proposal to the government for appointment of a Singapore based service provider which is working on ELVIS in Singapore and other countries.

BGMEA thinks this will help the EPB appoint a 'carrier service provider' very quickly without going for inviting tender.

The BGMEA is also ready to bear the cost of services under the system at least for one year, the sources said.

Director General of the EPB's Textile Cell Abdur Razzaq said

electronic transmission of documents on garments export under the ELVIS will help EPB in efficient handling of transmission of visa documents and prevent forgery.

Export visa is a document on shipment from Bangladesh to the US, duly signed and stamped on the original commercial invoice as per provision of the Visa and Textile Certificate Agreement between the two countries.

In the present system for sending documents, there are scope for using counterfeit stamps, forging signature of authorised officials of the EPB and sending goods by other countries in the name of Bangladesh.

Recently, the US customs seized huge garments consignments sent by ten Bangladeshi exporters allegedly with forged visa and quota documents and sent 31 export visas against those consignments to the EPB for further checking.

The EPB found that those export visas were not issued by the EPB. The exporters forged those or somebody else exported those consignments in their name.

Production in Khulna Hardboard Mill stopped

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, June 11: Production in Khulna Hardboard Mill came to a halt on Thursday due to space problem in its two godowns.

Nearly 29 lakh square feet of hardboards worth over Tk two crore are lying unsold, mill sources said. Without disposing of the huge quantity of hardboards stockpiled in the godowns, the mill won't be able to resume production, said a source today.

The source said that demand for Khulna hardboard has fallen drastically in domestic markets because dealers are importing it from abroad taking full advantage of free market economy. Many of the dealers are allegedly importing hardboard evading import tax and VAT in connivance with a

section of corrupt officials of the Customs Department. The demand for imported hardboards is gradually increasing also due to its better quality, the source said.

Besides, price of Khulna hardboard was increased by 28 per cent during 1997-98 financial year for which dealers are not willing to draw their quotas fearing financial loss. Quality of imported hardboard is superior to that of Khulna hardboard, the dealers observe.

Meanwhile, the imported hardboards have flooded local market. The mill authorities had declared incentive facility for dealers from May 17. But the dealers did not respond to the proposal forcing the management to close the mill indefinitely.

Beyond the boundary

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babwans briefly clawed themselves back into the game, and looked like keeping the score down to manageable proportions. It was Shahid Afridi, batting lower down the order, who bludgeoned a quickfire 30 plus, to set up 271 runs for the Zimbabweans to chase.

It was a tall order, and Zimbabwe were, predictably, found short of class in coping with the challenges posed by the potent Pakistani attack. It was again Neil Johnson, who had to fight a lone battle to keep his team afloat. Here is a man, who is destined in this tournament to stamp his class on every big match that he plays. He had just scored a heroic hundred against the Aussies, and now he single-handedly kept Pakistan at bay, for as long as he could. It was a pity that he received no support from his compatriots. The rest of the batting order basically watched the game from the dressing room.

Pakistan let loose its fast bowlers from the word go. Shoab Akhtar found his rhythm which was missing in the match against India. Here, he set the tone for the innings with an express delivery that thudded into Johnson's helmet. The message was also meant for the other teams left in contention for the Cup. He was hostile and he was quick. The captain gave him only a short burst with the new ball, but he did enough during that spell to soften up the Zimbabweans. It was just a question of time before the inevitable took place. The batting simply caved in, and had it not been for John-

son's lonely vigil, the Zimbabwean embarrassment would have been more than complete.

In the general turmoil that followed, Saqlain Mushtaq rehabilitated himself with a classic display of off-spin bowling. All in all, Pakistan delivered the coup de grace in style, and promised they have the resources for coming up with more of the same. There will be no quarter given, and none asked. The chips are down now. The winner takes all. The fact that Saqlain took a hatrick as well, summed up Pakistan's total dominance of the day's proceedings.

Pakistan, meanwhile, would be laughing all the way to the bank. They have come back from the doldrums of three defeats and have found their confidence and form. The batting looks like it has found its bearings, the bowling gives enough indication that its depth and variety should be able to trouble the best of opponents.

Many eyebrows have been raised at the prospect of Zimbabwe playing the semi-final without winning any of their matches in the Super Six. Teams like Australia and India, are still hard pushed to claim a spot in the last four, but they only have themselves to blame for their present predicament. The rules of the competition were the same for everybody, and if they have not taken advantage of them, they must leave themselves open to charity. Now, that is a commodity in very short supply at this time and place. This is the here and now. Existentialism is back in fashion.

Dhaka ready to take part in Kosovo peacekeeping

Bangladesh has offered to send troops for the UN peacekeeping force in the strife-torn Balkan region of Kosovo, reports UNB.

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad said this while talking to newsmen yesterday at the ZIA on his return from G-8 and NAM Troika FM's meeting in Germany.

"We've expressed our willingness to work with UN Peacekeeping Force in Kosovo and our intention was appreciated by the G-8 foreign ministers at the meeting," he said. Details about sending troops and the number would be worked out later on, he added.

About the meeting of the G-8, NAM Troika and G-77 held in Cologne on June 8, the Foreign Minister said it was useful as Dhaka raised various problems facing the LDCs following globalisation.

Azad told the meeting that a mechanism should be evolved to continue dialogue between

the G-8 and NAM so benefit of a new world economic order could be shared by the least developed countries.

Referring to his bilateral meeting with his German counterpart, Azad said the two sides discussed ways of boosting bilateral trade as Germany is the second-largest business partner of Bangladesh after USA.

Aktaruzzaman

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would try to resist it unthinkingly and build a greater movement mobilising the people."

But calling hartal that was not discussed in the BNP Parliamentary Party meeting, nor in the BNP Standing Committee, "is not acceptable to me," he said.

The MP said the BNP chairperson also did not give any such indications of calling strike. "Hartal call from non-parliamentary forum is not acceptable."

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Editor: Mahfuz Anam
Published by the Editor from City Publishing House Ltd., 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000 on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motiheel C.A., Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 866772-4, Commercial: 866771, Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA. Internet edition address: http://www.dailystarnews.com and Email address: dstar@bangla.net