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Down to Earth

Multiple Woes of City Commuters

By A S M Nurunnabi

The commuters of the Dhaka city run the gauntlet everyday in their efforts to reach their destinations by various modes of transport, such as buses, mini buses, rickshaws, bicycles, etc. But, besides the rickshaws, which create traumatic experience for their passengers on account of their extremely slow movement in the midst of pervasive traffic jams on almost all city roads, buses and mini buses constitute the most widely used mode of transport for the city commuters. But journeys by bus or minibus are no less traumatic in their various aspects. The city bus services are a grim reminder of the harrowing depths to which they have sunk in utter negligence for providing the basic facilities and passenger convenience.

Most of the buses which ply the city routes project a rundown look, with peeled off paints and emitting poisonous black smoke. The worn-out look of most of the buses raise the question why the authorities concerned, the BRTC, is so lax in ensuring proper maintenance of the buses which come to it for fitness certificate. The sad state of affairs resulting from the authority's failure in providing an even moderately tolerable management service in respect of the running buses has been continuing for a fairly long time. But no appreciable change for the better has so far been in evidence.

The woes of the bus passengers have many aspects. First, these buses tend to carry many more passengers than their certified capacity. Some of the buses carry eye-catching slogans, such as provision of seating service, nonstop journey to destinations, gate-lock system during their journeys.

In fact, all these are mere empty slogans: passengers are carried in excess of the seating capacity, there is no non-stop service, some passengers are even allowed to travel by hanging on to bus handles and footboards. The bus conductors are very negligent and rough mannered when passengers desire to get down at the prescribed stops. But when buses cannot move

forward for any reason, say traffic jam, the passengers are hustled to get down to well ahead of their destinations even in the middle of the road, thereby enhancing the risk of accident. The gates of the buses are not usually locked in course of their movements in order to entice more passengers to get in, as and when needed, without caring for the prescribed bus stops. Some buses are found to have the tendency to stop at the cross-roads for the purpose of embarking and disembarking. It is easy to imagine what hazards such practices entail.

In this respect also, the traffic police are usually found to be indifferent. The BRTC buses, lately introduced in city areas, are found to observe some discipline in the matter of ticketing in city areas, are found to observe some discipline in the matter of ticketing and halting at the designated stoppages. Significantly improved service is also noticeable in the operation of Metro AC coaches. Since the span of operation of these BRTC and Metro coaches is limited, the commuters at large using other public transports are subject to a greater degree of tribulation and suffering.

During the period of their deployment, some measure of improvement in traffic discipline was noticed. But, as such deployment cannot go on for any long period, the traffic police were expected to learn from them the manner of traffic management which such defence service personnel displayed. From the present chaotic state of traffic management, it seems that the traffic police are yet to fully grasp the manners of the examples set by those defence personnel.

Buses, minibuses and even taxi do not seem to care much about traffic discipline. The manner in which city's vehicular traffic is fast increasing, it has become incumbent on traffic controllers to bring about improvement in city traffic by stringent enforcement of traffic laws. Lately, visitors to Calcutta reported quite noticeable improvement in that city's traffic management.

If Calcutta, which is a much bigger city with much greater volume of vehicular traffic can attain visible improvement in their traffic system, there seems to be enough scope for us to act similarly if we have the will and determination for so

doing. If the existing poor state of traffic discipline is allowed to continue without taking specific measures for remedy, the livability of the city may be at stake.

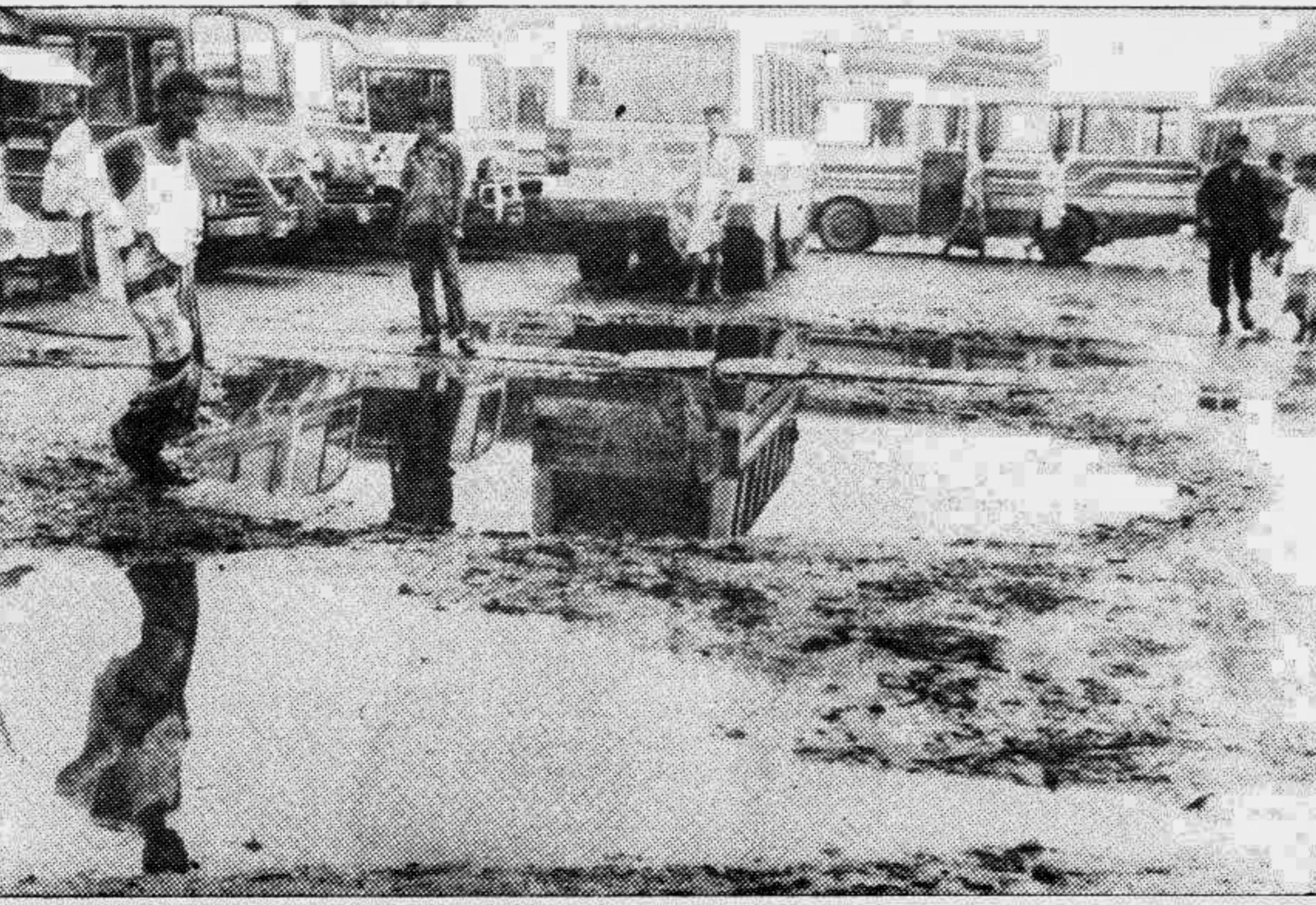
It has been lately noticed that the so-called Maxis, which have recently joined the ranks of running buses and mini buses, have gradually deteriorated in their service and appearance. They are said to be resorting to the same overloading as practised by the buses and mini buses.

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In the opinion of road users, the traffic picture can be substantially improved if the upper echelons of traffic police administration come down hard on their lower tiers to enforce strict observance of traffic laws at all city points and supervisory teams are given the tasks to oversee how the operating traffic police personnel are discharging their duties. The violators of traffic regulations may be strictly dealt with, giving them no opportunity to escape punishment by means of graft or otherwise.

The ever-growing number of rickshaws will continue to remain an intractable problems, so long as a viable solution cannot be devised for their gradual elimination and diverting the existing number of rickshaw pullers, as far as possible, to other avenues of employment with autorickshaws or other equally feasible means of livelihood. The proliferation of rickshaws may also be checked by drives against un-licensed ones.

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Stagnant rain water has left the Gabtali Bus Terminal in the city in a deplorable condition.

—Star photo by Sk Enamul Hadi

Kissinger hands over award to Hasina

PARIS, Sept 24: Standing ovation, welcoming slogans and claps resounded through the imposing UNESCO Headquarters this afternoon as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ceremonially took prestigious Felix Houphouet Boigny Peace Prize, reports UNB.

In an ironic historical footnote, former US Secretary of State and President of the Jury Henry Kissinger who opposed Bangladesh's Liberation War handed the laurels to Hasina, the eldest daughter of Bangladesh's founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Hasina earned the world recognition for restoring peace in the insurgency-torn Chittagong Hill Tracts by signing an agreement with PCJSS leader Shantu Larma on December 2, 1997 to end a long-running bloody conflict in the region.

An emotion-charged Bangladesh community at the tastefully decorated auditorium hall burst into cheers, clapping and welcome slogans as their beloved leader received the award.

Delegates of other countries attending the ceremony also gave standing ovation to the Bangladeshi leader.

Handing over the award to her Kissinger said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is awarded with the prize for holding negotiations with rebel tribal population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which resulted in a peace accord and restored peace in the region.

"Her efforts removed troubles in the region, reconciled the minority with dignity and ensured human rights of its members," Kissinger said.

Hasina said that the peace accord in Chittagong Hill Tracts was reached without any external help or mediation. "It was our problem, we have solved it ourselves," she noted.

She said Bangladesh has been trying to promote culture of peace in international forum including UNESCO and will continue to do so.

Hasina said peace was first threatened in 1971 when the people of this country were forced to fight liberation war. She said although Awami League won majority seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan, power was not transferred to its leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She said the military junta of Pakistan unleashed a reign of terror instead and committed genocide, which took a toll of three million lives eventually.

She also mentioned the gruesome killing of her father along with the members of family in 1975 by some misguided army men and said she and her sister escaped since they were out of the country. "I had to live in exile for many years, moving from one country to another and stalked by the fear of death at the hands of assassins all the time."

Sheikh Hasina said there were several attempts on her life but she did not refrain from her goal of giving her people their right to vote and food. She said her commitment to peace arises from personal experience.

Road barricade in Bandarban

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Sept 24: A businessman who was shot by muggers in the town yesterday, died at the Suhrawardy Hospital in Dhaka today, police said.

Paban Surkar, 40, managing director of the Glory Enterprise, was shot twice by a group of muggers who snatched Tk 3 lakh from him at Bangabandhu Sarak at about 1:30 pm yesterday.

Paban was attacked by the muggers when he was carrying the money from the Court Branch of Agrani Bank to his office on the BB Sarak.

He was rushed to Suhrawardy Hospital where he died at 1:30 pm today.

In the afternoon they held a rally at Traffic Crossing. District acting BNP president Prof Osmann Gani and Jamaat leader Moulana Dallur Rahman, among others, addressed the meeting.

The meeting was followed by a procession, which paraded main thoroughfares.

Industrial estates in 24 dists

BSCIC project fails for fund shortage

By Rafiq Hasan

Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) could not complete a project for setting up industrial estates in 24 districts in the last 12 years mainly due to fund constraints, sources concerned said.

The project was approved by the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ENC) in 1987 and BSCIC was asked to complete it by 1995.

According to BSCIC sources, the government so far granted Tk 34. 23 crore for the Tk 82.69 crore project.

Only six industrial estates have been set up. 10 are at different stages of implementation and work for the rest eight are yet to begin.

Some of the proposed estates could not be set up within the projected time due to land disputes. Later, the problem was

resolved by shifting the site or offering higher price for the land.

As the project could not be completed as scheduled, the time limit was extended up to 2000. BSCIC may seek another two years' extension, one source said.

The districts where implementation of the project is yet to begin are: Dhaka, Chuadanga, Narail, Barguna, Magura, Bandarban, Netrakona and Meherpur.

The completed industrial estates are in Narayanganj, Munsiganj, Bagerhat, Joypurhat, Chapainawabganj and Bholna.

The 10 districts where the project is being implemented are: Sherpur, Naogaon, Laxmipur, Kishorganj, Sharailpur, Sunamganj, Panchagarh, Khagrachari, Jhalakathi and Rangamati.

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Protest rallies

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to allies gaining majority.

Congress spokesman Kapil Sibal said the exit polls were a clear attempt to "mar" his party's prospects and said pollsters should be made accountable by law making mandatory the registration by the agencies which conduct such polls.

Hasina further pointed out that an Infrastructure Investment Facilities Company (IIFC) had been set up with the support of the World Bank to catalyse investment by the private sector in the development of ports, roads, energy, telecom and water supply.

Funded at a cost of US dollar 15 million the company will work closely with the infrastructure development company, another brainchild of the WB. The aim is to channel through the company some US dollar 225 million to the private sector companies as equity.

She said it would attract private capital to the tune of US dollar 1.5 billion in few years.

Indian polls

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Opposition parties claimed that BSF killed 70 people, including BDR, trespassing into Bangladesh territories for more than 2,000 times as well as unpreserved clashes with BDR nearly 260 times.

As parts of the central programme, main opposition BNP will organise a public meeting at city's Muktangan at 4 pm and will bring our processions after the meeting. Central and city BNP leaders will address the rally.

The city unit of Jatiya Party will hold a rally in front of its central office at Kalabagan at 5 pm.

Jamaat will hold its rally at the North Gate of Baitul Mukarram national mosque after Asr prayer and later bring out a procession. IOU will hold rally at Purana Paltan mosque premises after the Asr prayer.

Dilip who has also campaigned for Congress, said the party would register a massive electoral victory in the Lok Sabha elections. Congress has overcome its shortcomings and the youth are with us, he added.

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