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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 a 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 minibuses 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 run-down 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 BRTA, 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 hazardous such practices entail.

The traffic police are usually found to be quite indifferent in enforcing even the most elementary requirements of traffic regulations. Sometime ago, defence service personnel were deployed in certain congested city areas to bring about some discipline in traffic movements.

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 baby taxis 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

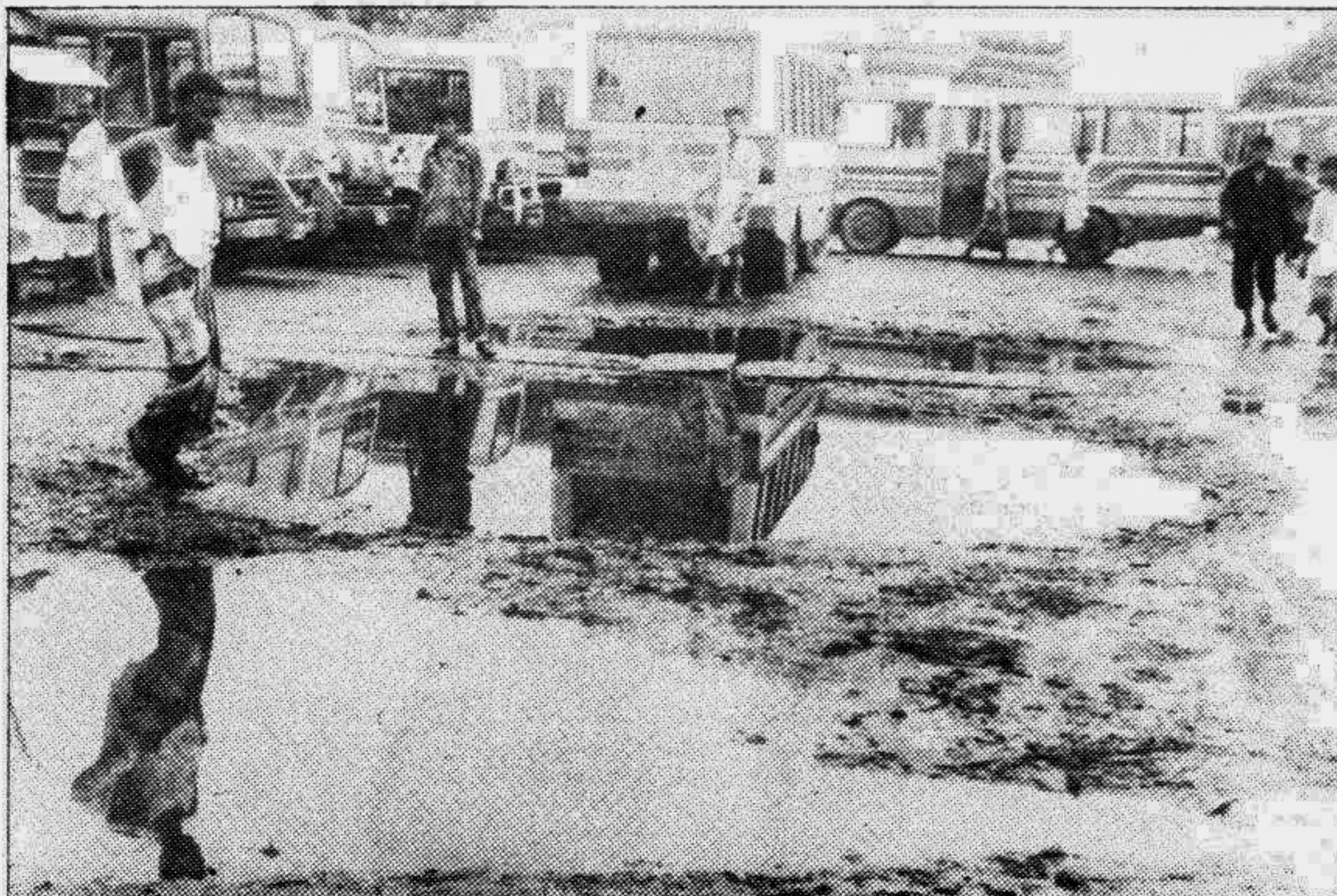
doing. If the existing poor state of traffic discipline is allowed to continue without taking specific measures for remedy, the livability of the city may be at stake.

It has been lately noticed that the so-called taxis, 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.

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.

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 problem, so long as a viable solution cannot be devised for their gradual elimination and diverting the existing number of rickshaws pullers, as far as possible, to other avenues of employment with autotrickshaws or other equally feasible means of livelihood. The proliferation of rickshaws may also be checked by drives against unlicensed ones.



Stagnant rain water has left the Gabtali Bus Terminal in the city in a deplorable condition. —Star photo by Sk Enamul Haq

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 Houphouët 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 ECJSS leader Shantu Lama 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 Bangladesh 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.

Boat capsizes Two bodies recovered

From Our Correspondent MYMENSINGH, Sep 24: Bodies of two victims of Wednesday's boat capsizing were found in the river Brahmaputra near Borochor area under Sadar thana today.

At least 15 passengers had been missing when the engine-driven boat capsized after being hit by a ferry in the Brahmaputra near the ferryghat.

One of the dead was identified as Shaheen, 21, a carpenter of the Roads and Highway Department.

Politics is too noisy, slippery

PATNA, Sept 24: Angry crowd threw stones at the dais created here for an election speech by former minister Dilip Kumar as he arrived after the deadline for electioneering passed, reports PTI.

The crowd went berserk and threw stones as Dilip reached the venue two hours after the 1700-hr deadline for campaigning passed, police said adding no one was injured in the incident. Dilip could not address the meeting at Gandhi Maidan here.

The veteran actor, after campaigning for RJD nominee for Patna Lok Sabha seat Ramkrishna Yadav, later told reporters: "Politics is too noisy, slippery and I am not cut out for the job." He said he did not intend to join active politics.

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.

Without naming any party, he said the communal and fascist forces are trying to bulldoze the established norms of democracy. He deplored deteriorating law and order across the country and said even metropolises like Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore were witnessing alarming rise in crimes.

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 (ECNEC) 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, Chaudhara, Narail, Barguna, Magura, Bandarban, Netrakona and Meherpur.

The completed industrial estates are in Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Bagerhat, Joypurhat, Chapainawabganj and Bhola.

The 10 districts where the project is being implemented are: Sherpur, Naogaon, Laxmipur, Kishoreganj, Shariatpur, Sunamganj, Panchagarh, Khagrachhari, Jhalakathi and Rangamati.

Gas-based industries

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About the gas sector the Prime Minister said: "We exactly don't know the quantum of gas reserves but we have huge local demand. We can only thin of exporting gas after meeting our present and future demand. However, we will welcome the gas-based industries in the country."

Michel Sallard noted that Bangladesh and France have an excellent business relations and that should be further improved for greater mutual benefit of both the nations.

Referring to Bangladesh's economic condition, Hasina said since mid-1996 performance of the economy had seen marked qualitative change.

"Fiscal discipline has been restored. The policies pursued over the past three years have already produced some remarkable results. We have endeavoured to take our economic fundamentals on right and appropriate track."

Country's present fiscal and monetary policies and stable macro performance have been praised by all, she apprised the French business elite.

Explaining on the investment-friendly policy package, the Prime Minister said the foreign investors had been kept out of the restriction of equity participation and there is no restriction on 100 per cent foreign-owned or joint-venture enterprises to purchase land for industry in Bangladesh.

Besides, the Board of Investment, the key government agency for facilitating foreign investment, has undertaken a number of measures including

setting up of a one-stop service for its clients.

A number of policy initiatives have been introduced to pursue private participation in infrastructure projects on build-operate-own, build-operate-transfer and build-operate-own-and-transfer models in the areas of power generation, gas exploration and exploitation.

Highways, including bridges, expressways, tunnels, industrial parks, private export processing zones, container terminals and so.

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 branch 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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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.

He said if Congress was voted to power, it would investigate "spurious" exit polls and enact necessary laws to find their source of funding and methodology adopted for such conducting this exercise.

While exit poll broadcast by state-run television Doordarshan gave a clear majority for BJP-led combine, the one put out by private "Star News" channel projected the ruling alliance getting an even bigger lead.

The CPI (M) said while it was not opposed to exit polls they should not be aired till the entire process of poll was over. He suggested some punitive measures against pollsters who go wrong.

Of BJP allies, only Janata Dal (United), a new outfit consisting of Samata Party, Lok Shakti and a breakaway group of Janata Dal, opposed airing of exit poll results before the completion of last phase of elections.

The BJP, on the other hand, has understandably welcomed exit polls. In fact, the government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had said that the Election Commission ban on airing of exit polls until the completion of entire polls process should be lifted.

WB blasts govt

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to give a partial guarantee for the loan.

Quoting AES officials, one source said as financing has become uncertain, the American company has decided to stop construction work for the Haripur project and decided to begin construction work for the first phase of Meghnaghat plant, scheduled to start in November.

The Cabinet's Purchase Committee last week decided to award the second phase of Meghnaghat project to Marubeni without any competitive bidding. Marubeni was the second lowest bidder for the first phase of Meghnaghat project and now it is pursuing the government to award it the second phase under the same tariff structure proposed by AES for the first phase.

The source further said that following the Purchase Committee decision high officials of AES Bangladesh projects were summoned to the Regional Head Office in Dubai and were instructed to suspend the construction activities. AES had started construction work in April from its own funds to meet the project completion deadline.

The deadlock was unlikely to be resolved before AES was ensured to project loans from

Process to purify water contaminated by arsenic

By Staff Correspondent

A private research organisation has developed a scientific process to purify water contaminated by arsenic.

The president of the private research organisation AARSCI, Dr M A Hasan, innovated the process. The process was formally demonstrated at a seminar at CIRDP auditorium on Thursday last. He also explained the simple process of water purification using one kind of adsorbent.

Dr Hasan also demonstrated the adsorbent formulation process using raw materials available in villages. The main raw materials are: Coconut chole and rice husk.

Health advisor of British High Commissioner Dr P N Ecstain, advisor to the Netherlands ambassador Arif Ahsan and other government and non-government personalities involved with health issues were present at the seminar, said a press release of the AARSCI.

Editor : Mahfuz Anam

Published by the Editor from City Publishing House Ltd., 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000 on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motijheel C.A., Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial: 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

Clandestine Shibir unit at DU girls' dormitory

By DU Correspondent

Students of Shamsunnahar Hall of Dhaka University in a joint operation at the hall on Wednesday night recovered some 'objectionable documents' from the activists of Bangladesh Chhatra Shibir (BCS).

The drive was jointly launched by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU), as a part of their recent anti-Shibir operation on the campus.

The students launched the drive after obtaining some specific evidence about the 'objectionable' activities of the Shibir workers at the hall.

The students began to search the rooms of the hall at about 11 a.m. on Wednesday night and recovered a diary and some papers containing the names of members of a 55-member Islamic Chhatra Shena (ICS) Unit of the hall.

They also recovered party attendance registers, money receipts and other documents from room No. 2003A huge number of politically motivating posters were also recovered from the room.

In a joint statement yesterday leaders of BCL, JCD and BCU said that the recovered materials were handed over to the provost of the hall.

The statement quoting the recovered diary said Shawkat Ara Khan Kemi and Jesmin of Management, Farida Yasmin of Soil Science Nipu of Islamic Studies departments were involved in politically motivating the general students, particularly those who practiced "purdah" at the hall.

Many students of the hall alleged that the Shibir activists used to arrange clandestine meetings with Jamaat Amir Gollam Azam. "A good number of DU teachers are also involved with the organisation's activities."

The identified shibir activists admitted their involvement with the Jamaat-backed student organisation at a meeting of the student bodies with the provost yesterday.

The three students bodies will also hold another meeting today to decide whether the identified shibir activists would be ousted from the hall or not, the statement added.

The statement signed by Runu Dey and Sheoli Afari of BCL, Halima and Siddika Begum of JCD and Sumi and Shayla Parveen of BCU also urged the students of DU to remain united against the Shibirites.

When contacted, the Shamsunnahar Hall Provost, Prof. Sultana Shafi, confirmed the incident but declined to make any comment. "First I will go through the entire matter before talking to the press," she added.

Meanwhile, another five Shibir activists were beaten up and ousted from the Ziaur Rahman Hall of the university. They are Al Amin, Md. Nazrul Islam, Zafar Ullah and Bacchu.

AL-BNP politics

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ple, suddenly or in an organised manner, by creating panic or applying force, at any place including markets, streets, vehicles or in any premises — will be sentenced to death, or imprisonment for life, or given rigorous prison terms for not more than twenty years."

"In any case," the ordinance said, "the minimum punishment will not be less than five years, while he/she will also be awarded financial penalty. Besides, the Tribunal or the High Court may direct the convict concerned to pay compensation to the affected person or the organisation."

The law had also said that anyone found guilty of helping criminals commit the said crimes would also be awarded the said punishment.

The then opposition parties found the wordings of the law nothing but political traps for the opposition leaders and activists who were fighting against various "undemocratic practices" of the government of Khaleda Zia.

But recently, the government of Sheikh Hasina has approved the draft of a law — The Public Safety (Special Provision) Act, 1999 — providing, along with other things, all "controversial" provisions of the Suppression of Terrorist Offences Act, 1992. Even the wordings of the offences are same, not to mention the provision for trial in special tribunals and the process of trial.

The only change is that the present government has replaced capital punishment with life term, and 90 days for trial with 120 days.

The anti-terrorism ordinance promulgated by President Biswas was placed before the members of Jatiya Sangsad on October 11, 1992.

All the opposition parties led by Sheikh Hasina's AL had vehemently opposed it in the House. They had staged a stormy walkout in protest against the Speaker's ruling that allowed the ordinance to be placed before the House.

Before the walk out, as the newspapers reported, the then leader of the opposition 'Sheikh Hasina' urged the law minister to withdraw the ordinance saying: "the existing law of the land is enough to suppress terrorism."

Home Minister of the present government, Mohammad Nasim, who was the Chief Whip of the Opposition at that time had told the House that the anti-terrorism ordinance was "a black law of the highest order."

Ironically, Nasim's ministry has now proposed the similar, and controversial Public Safety (Special Provision) Act, 1999. He is now defending what he opposed earlier.

Desperate to oppose BNP's anti-terrorism ordinance in 1992, the AL-led opposition had moved a non-approval motion in the House.

While moving the motion, Nasim had asked in the House on October 26, 1992: "Not necessarily the incumbent Prime Minister or the home minister will abuse the proposed law, but the corrupt law enforcing agencies of the country will take advantage of the anti-people law by using it against common people." Can minister Nasim be sure that the law he is proposing will not be abused by the same agencies?

The motion was, however, defeated by the sheer majority of BNP lawmakers in parliament those days.

Defeated in the division vote,

the opposition parties except Jamaat-e-Islami had announced on the night of October 28, '92 that "they would continue to boycott the House and take to the streets to force the ruling party to withdraw the anti-terrorism law."

According to newspaper reports at that time, the BNP government got the anti-terrorism bill passed in the House on November 1, 1992 with the entire opposition remaining outside. The President assented to the bill on November 6, 1992.

A few hours before the passage of the bill, Sheikh Hasina told a city rally that the bill was "unconstitutional and against human rights."

The opposition continued to boycott parliament proceedings until a couple of days of the next session that began on January 3, 1993, the beginning of which witnesses President Biswas addressing the House.

Justifying boycott of the presidential speech, Mohammad Nasir, a spokesman of the BNP, said: "President had not only promulgated the black ordinance, but had also assented to the bill after it was passed only by the BNP members."

On December 5, 1993, Sheikh Hasina, while addressing a gathering at her party office in the city, termed the anti-terrorism ordinance "a mini martial law" and said: "Government has snatched away people's right to protest by introducing the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance as military rulers did in the past. We will resort to appropriate action to resist the mini martial law by the neo-autocrats."

Six years after her announcement to resist a "mini-martial law", Sheikh Hasina herself is now poised to impose another law in a different name which is a virtual copy of the BNP proposed law. And like the opposition leader of the past, Khaleda Zia (in power then and in opposition now) is preparing to oppose that law. Present day politics of both the parties is a reflection of their earlier politics, with the only difference that AL and BNP are in opposite roles.

Tip-off

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when Rais carried the consignments to the hotel, they immediately informed the DNC team to arrest him. There were two other 'sellers' involved with the three Pakistanis arrested along with the heroin. But the two escaped. Their identity could not be traced yet, the sources said.

After recovery of the drug and arrest of the three, the two British officials went to the NDC head office and also took photos of the smugglers, the sources said.

The British officials also told DNC that some Bangladeshis were involved in the racket.

The arrested three Pakistanis — Ibrahim, Alefzan and Rais — were interrogating by DNC officials for the third day yesterday. They are on a five-day remand.

The DNC has asked the SB, CID, DB and NSI to assist it in the investigation.

The DNC DG told The Daily Star last night: "Every department has its own method of investigation. We have requested the departments to assist us in this matter."

In the biggest ever drug haul in the country, the Department of Narcotics Control recovered 24.1 kg of heroin worth about 40 lakh Pounds from hotel Razmoni Isa Kha and arrested three Pakistani nationals on Monday.