

Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal ponders on whether the country should go for gas exports or not

Two pages on the occasion of the National Day of China

Noted singer Nilufer Yasmin face to face with Navine Murshid



Versatile actor Golam Mustafa talks about his teenage days to A Maher



## Day in, day out in deep disorder

By Morshed Ali Khan

At 7:30 am on any working day in the Dhanmondi residential area, thousands of staff of an estimated 150 private English medium schools, colleges and universities, offices and shops situated between Road-1 to 27 start to pour into the area by rickshaws, autorickshaws and other vehicles. Soon the only operating narrow bridge at Road-8 starts to get choked. Deafening horns from brand new cars fill the air surpassing many a decibel. Traffic moves literally at a snail's pace.

Half an hour later, at 8 am, rickshaws, autorickshaws, microbuses and cars carrying anxious looking parents accompanying their children rush to the area from every intersection of the residential area plunges into a traffic mess. And building materials stacked on the roads force the two-way traffic to go mad.

Unruly and impatient motorists and rickshaw drivers, apparently ignorant of the traffic rules and devoid of common sense, try to force their way into whatever space they have in front of them.

Vehicles take the right without leaving any space for the oncoming ones. Others from behind follow suit. There is no way to reverse. Hundreds of vehicles from every direction start to blow their horn. At places one or two frustrated guardians get down from their vehicles to untie the seemingly impossible knot.

Hopeless, mothers disembark from their vehicles and

start galloping towards schools fearing refusal of entry for being late. The walk too is hazardous, for the pavement has been encroached upon by construction materials, makeshift shops, cattle sheds or uncovered manholes.

The chaos continues in front of many schools. Teachers, officials and heads of some of the busy schools point their finger at the 'irresponsible guardians and drivers' for the sickening situation.

"You will see the vehicles arriving at the school gate from the wrong side of the road and parents taking all the time on earth to say good-bye to their children and drivers descending to open the boot for the school bags. The worst part is that they are totally indifferent to others' rights," said a principal of a school who preferred to remain unnamed.

During school hours Saturday road and roads 7, 8, 15, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32 wear the same look. At Road-25, with four schools and the 400-bed Bangladesh Medical College (BMC), the traffic situation reached such a proportion that the BMC authorities had to 'engage' traffic police apart from taking their own initiative to make the road a one-way thoroughfare. An investigation revealed that the BMC has turned its parking space into class rooms leaving hundreds of vehicles to park on the narrow road outside. Two multi-storey buildings side by side house the

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## A major quake could be catastrophic

Violation of building codes and sub-standard construction have made two major cities all the more vulnerable, caution experts

By Shehab Ahmed



En route to doom

With unplanned growth and rampant violation of building code, the capital is on a precarious footing. A major earthquake could cause colossal damage, warn seismologists.

Star photo: A K M Mohsin

Most buildings of Dhaka and Chittagong cities may be reduced to rubble if and when hit by a major earthquake as builders so far have not cared to adhere to building codes and use proper construction materials.

The aftermath of such a quake would be "catastrophic if not apocalyptic," as the country still lacks capabilities to respond to such an eventuality, experts caution.

These major cities fall in Seismic Zone-2. But buildings mushrooming in the cities are not built as per specification, following the building code made in 1993, they said.

Bangladesh, lying on a major seismic fault line have not had a major quake above 6 on the Richter scale since early this century.

There have been seven major quakes since 1869 — the January 10, 1869.

Cachar earthquake registered 7.5 on the Richter scale. Its epicentre was only 250 miles off Dhaka and Sylhet, which suffered most.

The Bengal earthquake of July 1885 had been on 7 Richter scale and an epicentre 10 miles off Dhaka.

The July 1918 Srimangal earthquake had a 7.6 Richter scale impact and occurred only 150 miles off the city.

The Dhubri quake in 1930 had been on 7.1 Richter scale and the epicentre was 250 miles away from Dhaka.

The two devastating tremors, both having a strength of 8.3 and 8.5 on the Richter scale respectively occurred on

January 1934 and August 15, 1950, took place in Bihar and Nepal and in Assam.

The 'shallow focal depth' had prevented Dhaka from destruction during the nearest quake in Srimangal.

But Bangladesh's capabilities to monitor quakes are vintage. Only one seismic observatory in Chittagong, set up in the early fifties cannot cope with the need. Often it cannot even record the intensity and spot the epicentre because the obser-

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vatory uses outdated equipment which even remain out of order more often than not.

Mushrooming of high rises, buildings growing like concrete jungles under bad supervision, use of adulterated cement, poor construction material make the post-quake possibilities look more like a nightmare than anything else, architects and engineers interviewed by the Star said.

Researchers at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) say that they are preparing a

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## Opposition programme passes off peacefully

Police stop EC-bound marchers at different points

By Staff Correspondent

Police halted thousands of opposition activists at different points in the city as they marched towards the Election Commission Secretariat yesterday to lay a siege to it to press their various demands including resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner.

The simultaneous siege programme of the BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya jete, however, passed off peacefully. Some smaller parties including Jagg and NDA also marched towards the EC office.

The BNP-led opposition alliance announced the EC siege programme on September 22 to press its demands — resignation of CEC Muhammad Abu Hena, restructuring of EC, preparation of fresh voters' list and identity cards by cancelling the current 'faulty' list and ID cards and inclusion of the voters who have not been included in the present list.

As part of the programme, BNP and JP separately marched towards the EC Secretariat from Kalabagan, Jamaat from

Maghbazar and IOJ from Asad Gate crossing at noon.

BNP and JP processions were halted by police at Dhanmondi Road-27 crossing while that of Jamaat and IOJ at Bangla Motor Crossing and Manik Mia Avenue respectively.

The government had earlier imposed a 24-hour ban from 6 am yesterday on any rallies, processions and gatherings in the area around the EC office.

Tight security measures were

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## Close call

By Staff Correspondent

A senior Unicef official miraculously escaped unscathed after a train hit his car yesterday at the level-crossing near Sonargaon Hotel.

Bala Gopal was on his way to work, driving along the Sonargaon side of the two-lane road when the accident took place at 7-50 in the morning. At this hour, the other side is usually occupied by traders at the local 'wholesale' fish market, forcing all vehicles to a single lane.

Negotiating his way through the bustling traffic, he drove straight on to the level crossing which was kept open, completely unaware of the onrushing train.

"It was a brush with destiny," Bala Gopal said. "It is certainly the providence of God."

Fortunately, the train hit the nose of his Hyundai sedan and he received a severe whiplash.

Railway police said they had received a letter from Bala Gopal describing the incident. OC, GRP at Kamalapur told The Daily Star at 9-35 p.m. that the matter was under investigation and the investigating officer, was yet to return. No action was taken against the on-duty gatekeeper but he was being interrogated, he said.

The car (OJA a 049) had been damaged and was taken away by Unicef, he said.

There had been a number of accidents at the level-crossing in the past. Gate-keepers were accused of negligence on their part.

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## Guenter Grass gets Nobel Literature Prize

By Staff Correspondent

STOCKHOLM, Sept 30: Novelist Guenter Grass, Germany's best-known writer of the post-World War II generation, won the 1999 Nobel Prize in Literature today, reports AP.

The announcement brought a smile from the 71-year-old author. "I'm happy," he told journalists after emerging with his wife and dog from his house in Behlendorf in northern Germany.

The Swedish Academy cited Grass' first novel, "The Tin Drum," published in 1959, for ushering in a new era for German literature "after decades of linguistic and moral destruction."

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## River transport strike postponed

By Staff Correspondent

Water Transport Owners' Association postponed its planned strike yesterday after a fruitful discussion with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her official residence, reports UNB.

Despite her illness, the Prime Minister met the representatives of the WTOA in the afternoon and listened to their problems, official sources said.

Hasina directed the authori-

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## NAM preparation still in the air

Infrastructure building is yet to get off the ground

By M Anwarul Haq

Preparations for the upcoming NAM Summit at Dhaka are still at a conceptual level, according to many observers.

With less than two years left for the Summit, infrastructure development activities are yet to begin on the desired scale for the great international meeting.

Unlike other major cities, where previous NAM Summits were held, the last in South Africa's cosmopolitan city of Durban, Dhaka's main disadvantage happens to be the lack of sufficient infrastructure facilities, particularly related to conferencing, hotel accommodation

and a service industry. Bangladesh's experience in hosting international conferences has remained limited to holding twice the 7-nation SAARC Summit, the eight nation D-8 meet and the 56-member OIC Conference of foreign ministers in 1983.

Delegations from some 114 nations of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) are expected to arrive at the Bangladesh capital in the first week of September 2001, for the next Summit, which is the 13<sup>th</sup> in its 39-year career. An estimated 5000 for-

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Mr Salim A Khan MBA, who is the seniormost qualified management professional in the Housing Industry of Bangladesh and the founding President & C.E.O. of Advanced Developments & Holdings Ltd, presenting the keynote lecture on "Quality Management Strategies for Business" in a workshop organized recently by Advanced Developments & Holdings Ltd and N.A.I.M.E. a trans-national Group specialized in management development. Mr A Qudus Jewel, Managing Director (seated first from left) also read a paper on "Quality Improvement Prospects in Real Estate." The opening session of the workshop was presided over by Dr Lutfur Rahman, Chairman of the Company (seated second from left). It may be mentioned that Mr Salim A Khan MBA was the founding M.D. of Advanced Development Technologies Ltd, in which his family had owned 50% shares. The new company, Advanced Developments & Holdings Ltd, will be investing in the Education, Housing and Health sectors.

## Duty on onion goes

By Staff Correspondent

The government has decided to allow duty-free import of onion with immediate effect to contain its price-hike on the domestic market, says UNB.

"This decision came into effect from today and would continue up to March 31, 2000," said an official announcement yesterday.

In the wake of uptrend in onion prices for the last few days, the government withdrew all 7.5 per cent duty on onion imports to facilitate consumers to have the daily necessity at a reasonable price.

The government also withdrew all taxes and duties on onion imports last year to stabilise the overheating market of the spice item.

Onion became dear for big production shortfalls in the country in recent years. Almost same is the scenario in neighbouring India from where the country gets a large quantum of onions.

The handout from the Commerce Ministry said about 30 per cent of the total annual consumption of onion is fulfilled from local production while the

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