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Down to Earth

New trends in city life

By A S M Nurunnabi

City life in Dhaka has been witnessing changes in many ways. Lately such changes have been of a kind that might have been unforeseen or unheard of fifteen or twenty years ago. The changes cover certain specific fields involving, in lesser or greater degrees, trends of privatisation. The expression 'privatisation' has at present become quite common when applied to enterprises which were previously owned or operated by government, semi-government agencies or corporations, and there-after, taken over by private organizations or individuals. The expression is now used extensively to connote service facilities offered by private agencies in some aspects of urban life.

Some specific areas in this behalf are indicated, reflecting the trends of so-called privatisation in city life. Traders, businessmen and residents in many city areas are trying their own solutions to burgeoning traffic problems. They are found to employ men with batons and sticks to discipline unruly road users. Owing to their initiatives, there has been reportedly a significant improvement in traffic flow in many lanes and by-lanes in the old part of the city, to the relief of many dwellers in those areas. In the new part of the city also, business people affected by traffic jams are reportedly following suit.

Private traffic managers can be seen active in many places of the city, such as Maghbazar, Khilgaon, New Market, Green Road, Syedabad, Gabtoli, Mouchak and Tejgaon. These private traffic managers appear on the roads in those areas when traffic jams there become quite serious affecting business interests of traders bordering the congested roads. In other words, the motivating force for taking such private initiatives in traffic management is said to be that businesses in those areas used to suffer greatly owing to persistent traffic congestions for long hours which hindered their business. For this chaotic traffic

indiscipline, some modes of transport, particularly rickshaws, taxis, push carts, and trucks are, more or less, responsible. When the affected business houses deploy some youngsters, in some cases with some kind of uniform and equipping them with sticks on the streets with instructions to handle firmly the unruly slow-moving vehicles, the efforts reportedly started to pay dividends. In exchange for their services, such private traffic managers are paid from funds raised by the shop-owners in the locality.

The security of private property is another sphere in respect of which the city dwellers at present don't tend to rely on the government agencies for maintaining law and order. 'Privatisation has entered its sphere also. It is now the current practice with many private firms, institutions and individuals to keep their own security guards to ensure protection. Some of the private security guards were their own patterns of uniforms provided by their employers. Security concerns have lately become an important issue with many private bodies, so much so that new organizations have come up with providing services of personnel for those private bodies who require them.

Garbage clearance from private premises and homes has lately assumed significance with city dwellers, as the Dhaka City Corporation has often been found to be lax on account of its operatives not doing their work of clearance properly in many city areas. This has spawned the growth of a new set-up of private personnel, who, on receipt of small payment on monthly basis, have taken upon themselves the task of collecting garbage from individual homes at fixed time of the day and dumping them into the large-sized garbage containers placed at roadsides by the City Corporation. This has at least relieved individual homes in many city areas of the unpleasant job of carrying refuse garbage from individual homes to the city

Corporation's garbage bins. The introduction of courier service for delivery of private mails and packages within the country (outside work in this behalf is done by a network of agencies) is another dimension of provision of private service, as the Postal Service of the government has been found to be not so prompt and regular in the performance of its various kinds of work. Since inland courier service has, by and large, shown better performance in its assignments, increasing number of people tend to depend on it, rather than DC, Postal Department, when such service requirement is urgent.

A privatisation trend is also noticeable in telecommunication sector. The Government's Telephone Department is at present not in a position to meet the huge demand for private telephone connection because of its constraints of various nature. In this situation, private telecommunication companies have been given licence to provide cellular telephone facilities to those interested, though initially the cost of installation and equipment for mobile connection was comparable to the cost of getting government telephone connection. Lately, the cost of getting a mobile telephone has considerably come down. As a result, we find proliferation of mobile telephones here and there.

The public reliance on the country's railway system seems to be waning, as more private buses and coaches of large size, some equipped with AC facilities, are coming on the roads on long routes. Journeys by such road transports involve less time with greater passenger comfort. As such, they are getting increasingly popular with the travelling public.

All in all, the current trends of privatisation in many spheres of city life have emerged as new phenomena, as the concerned public organisations seem to be incapable of providing the nature of services expected of them.

Beat peon of Bangla daily confined at DB office for 8 hrs

By Staff Correspondent

A beat peon of a Bangla daily newspaper was confined for more than eight hours at the Detective Branch office of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) at Minto Road yesterday.

The victim was identified as Misar Ali, 20, a beat peon of The Daily Jangar.

The incident took place at 7 am yesterday when the victim went to the Rajarbagh police lines to distribute copies of the daily.

A sentry at the north gate of the police lines kept him waiting for more than an hour before allowing him inside. After distributing most of his copies Misar handed a copy to DC, headquarters, Habibur Rahman.

When Misar was returning from the area, Rahman called him back after having a glance at a news item in the newspaper which criticised Rahman.

The DC confined him inside the Rajarbagh police lines and later sent him to the Detective Branch of police. A case was also filed against him under Section 54. The victim claimed that during his eight-hour confinement, he was not served any food.

Later leaders of the Crime Record and Investigation of Bangladesh (CRAB) had released him after signing a bond in this regard.

The DC was not available for comments.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina having a look at the model of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque where two minars, both 300ft high, will be build as part of its beautification programme.

— Star photo

Venice film festival to honour Clint Eastwood

VENICE (Italy), Feb 25: The Venice film festival hopes to go ahead and make Clint Eastwood's day — with a golden lion for his career's achievements, reports Reuters.

"He has never stopped using cinema to reveal the hypocrisy and corruption within our society, to satirise the absurdity of certain conventions, to make fun of his own image as a macho man and to reflect on the consequences of violence to both victims and perpetrators," the organisers said in a statement.

Eastwood, 69, uttered his immortal line — "Go ahead, make my day" — in "Sudden Impact".

He came to prominence in Sergio Leone's "Spaghetti Westerns" including "A Fistful of Dollars" and "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly", but is perhaps best known as the cynical tough guy of the "Dirty Harry" movies. "Unforgiven" won him Oscars for best director and best movie in 1993.

"Eastwood's strength lies in being both a Hollywood icon and one of its most subtle and understated critical consciences, and it is these qualities that the award intends to recognise," the statement said.

He has already been honoured by the American Film Institute for a career as actor, director, producer, scriptwriter and composer spanning more than 45 years.

AL MP joins protesters Ultimatum to Rajuk to cancel DND plan

By Reaz Ahmad

Thousands of residents of a sprawling city suburb yesterday gave an ultimatum to Rajuk to cancel its Detailed Area Plan for DND (Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra) area within 15 days.

Their month-long protest against the DAP took a new turn with a ruling party lawmaker from Narayanganj joining the protesters at a rally at Link Road near Jabbari in the city yesterday.

Giving the ultimatum to Rajuk from the rally, AKM Shamim Osman MP said, "If I fail to make Rajuk cancel its plan in 15 days, I'll resign from the Jatiya Sangsad".

The protesters warned that they would go to any extent to protect their right over the land. President of a peoples' committee that launched the agitation against the Rajuk move, Md Nazim Uddin Ahmed, demanded of the authorities to revoke the plan and said otherwise tougher action programmes would be taken up.

When contacted, Rajuk Chairman Azizul Haq said, "It is a government decision taken back in 1998 that Rajuk would make a plan for DND so that the capital city expands in a planned manner".

He said that Rajuk was asked to prepare the plan. "It is not our job to acquire land there. Whatever we're doing, we're doing by consulting the people living within the DND project area".

The Rajuk Chairman assured people living inside the DND project area that nothing would be done against their will.

He, however, declined to make any comment on what the Awami League lawmaker said at the rally yesterday.

Mentionably, about one million people live in DND area.

Clinton's visit raises Kashmiris' hopes

SRINAGAR (India), Feb 25: On a peaceful general strike day in Srinagar, Kashmiri men and women gathered today at the main mosque in Srinagar to express hope that the visit next month by President Bill Clinton will bring peace and independence to Kashmir Valley, reports AP.

"If Mr Clinton is coming to India, why should he not come to us," said an old teacher, Mohammad Yusuf Qureshi.

He sat on the grass at the Jamia Mosque, surrounded by men expressing hope that Clinton, leader of the world's only superpower, would pressure India to withdraw from the Himalayan region.

Clinton has said that he would be glad to mediate between India and Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir, the major point of contention between the two nuclear arms neighbours.

But he said he would not do so unless both governments asked him, and India's government has said it is not interested in outside interference on what it considers a bilateral issue with Pakistan.

A general strike had been called in the Kashmir Valley by the All Party Hurriyat Conference, a group of pro-independence opposition parties and former guerrilla groups that want Kashmir to be independent or united with Pakistan.

They were protesting the shooting death Tuesday of an activist and suspected militant Ghulam Mohideen Najar.

The Hurriyat Conference says it believes that Najar was killed by security forces, which have imposed a crackdown in the weeks leading up to Clinton's visit.

Many people in the city are looking forward to Clinton's March 20-25 visit. Although a discussion on Kashmir is not on any official agenda, it is expected to be raised at press conferences during his period.

One of the men at the mosque said that during Clinton's visit, "We will do protests here to draw attention to what is happening here," Ghulam Nabi said. "He needs to see with his own eyes what is happening here."

The people of the city say that security forces have increased individual killings during raids and in what they say is retaliation by militants on security forces.

5 killed in Pabna bus plunge

PABNA, Feb 25: Five people were killed and some 25 injured when a bus fell into road side ditch on the Dhaka-Pabna highway this evening, reports UNB.

Police said the accident took place when the Pabna-bound bus carrying devotees from an Urs Mahfil tried to give side to the truck coming from opposite direction at Ahammadpur in Sujanagar thana.

The truck, however, could pass safely. Four of the devotees died on the spot and another on the way to hospital.

The injured were taken to Sujanagar thana health complex and Pabna Sadar Hospital. Identities of the victims could not be known immediately.



Students of St Gregory's High School brought out a colourful rally in the city yesterday with a banner reading "Enlightened people needed to build a beautiful world." The school was celebrating the dawn of the new millennium.

— Star photo

Israeli jets bomb targets in South Lebanon

BEIRUT, Feb 25: In renewed hostilities after several days of calm, Israeli jets struck targets in southern Lebanon in apparent retaliation for a guerrilla attack on an Israeli outpost near the border today, reports AP.

Today's air raid was the first in southern Lebanon in a week and came amid increasingly acrimonious exchanges between Israeli and Lebanese officials.

Earlier this week, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy threatened to make Lebanon pay "blood for blood, soul for soul, child for child" if his country was attacked from southern Lebanon. Lebanese Prime Minister Salim Hoss on Thursday denounced the remarks, saying Levy revealed himself as "one suffering from the complex of haughtiness and racism."

Meanwhile, the government today expressed dismay at comments made by Prime Minister Lionel Jospin of France, Lebanon's former colonial master, in which he condemned guerrilla attacks by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah against Israeli troops in southern

Lebanon. Hezbollah denounced Jospin's remarks as a disgrace to France, describing them in a statement as "hostile and no less brutal than the Zionist crimes."

In today's hostilities, two Israeli jets struck a hilly area just north of an Israeli-occupied zone southeast of the port city of Tyre at 8:10 am local time, firing two air-to-air missiles, according to Lebanese security officials. There was no immediate word on casualties, they said in southern Lebanon on customary condition of anonymity.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina having a look at the model of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque where two minars, both 300ft high, will be build as part of its beautification programme.

— Star photo

AL against using religion in politics: Hasina

Foundation of new Baitul Mukarram Minar laid

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who laid the foundation stone of 300-feet high Minar of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque yesterday, said her government would continue to serve Islam as it did in the past, reports UNB.

"We don't believe in trading of religion or using it in politics," she told the foundation laying ceremony on the premises of the national mosque in the morning.

Hasina said some people had always tried to use Islam as a political weapon to serve their personal and political interests. They want to plunder wealth and resources of others by capitalising on religion.

Deploping false campaigns against Awami League over the years by the traders of religion, she said, "We're victims of false propaganda... But, we've always demonstrated our faith and values in Islam through our deeds."

Hasina called for greater unity of the Muslim Ummah and preaching Islam in a convincing way so that people could understand it and deeply follow it.

Turning to various efforts of the post-independent government of Bangladesh for the cause of Islam, she said the Awami League government had worked silently for preaching and spreading Islam.

Hasina said it was Bangladesh who had banned horserace, renaming "Race Course Maidan" as Suhrawardy Uddayan. He also banned liquor and gambling.

She said Bangladesh became the member of OIC during the Bangabandhu government. He joined the OIC conference in Lahore in 1974. Bangabandhu established "Sirat Mission" and "Islamic Foundation", Bangladesh, through an ordinance on March 28, 1975 in ad-

dition to setting up Madrassah Education Board.

The Prime Minister said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman selected the site on the bank of river Turag for "Tablig Jamaat" and allocated land for Kakrail Mosque.

After independence, she said three acres of land were allocated for Baitul Mukarram mosque without "possession money" through Wakf at the initiative of Bangabandhu.

About the construction of two Minars and beautification of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, the Prime Minister said her government has already allocated Tk 15 crore for the project and would allocate more, if necessary.

She said in order to uphold the tradition of Dhaka as a city of mosques, two 300-feet high Minars would be constructed, enhancing the beauty of the national mosque as well as the city.

"I hope that the holy appeal of Azan will be made from this Minar and devotees would rush to the Mosque to seek divine blessings and do welfare of the people," said Hasina.

The Prime Minister said the beautification plan of the mosque would include construction of fountains and boundary walls, portraying of

Islamic calligraphy and cooling system of its "Shahana".

In response to a demand from Baitul Mukarram Merchants Association, she assured that Baitul Mukarram market would be developed as a modern shopping centre.

Listing steps for development of Islam, Hasina said her government constructed Haji Camp at a cost of Tk 40 crore and completed the building of Islamic Foundation at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar spending Tk 10 crore.

She said Tk 21.80 crore had been allocated for Imam Training Academy, Tk 37.50 crore for mosque-based children's and mass education programme and Tk 10 crore for Islamic publications.

Besides, the government allocated Tk four crore for setting up libraries in mosques while Tk 30 crore for different Islamic curriculums and activities.

State Minister for Religious Affairs Maulana Nurul Islam, Deputy Minister for Rural Development Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Religious Affairs Secretary Mahfuz Sobhan and Director General of Islamic Foundation Maulana Abdul Awal and Baitul Mukarram Merchants' Association President Alhaj Sirajul Huq also spoke on the occasion.

From Page 1
Hasina said one can force the President to sign any Bill.

She denied the allegation that her government had forced the President to assent to the Public Safety Bill.

"Rather opposition parties, some noted politicians, even a section of lawyers requested the President not to sign the bill," Hasina retorted.

The President asked for some amendments to the Bill. We have already formed a committee and have already prepared a draft. The draft was shown to the President," she said.

The Bill was sent to the President after the cabinet approved it. Then the president wrote that it was a money bill, she said.

The Prime Minister said "Yes" when The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam wanted to know for sure whether the President himself wrote it to be a money bill.

On February 9, a press release was issued from the Bangabhaban. It was published in national dailies the next day. The press release denied that the President had termed it a money bill, said Anam. "Then can we say that the press release issued from the Bangabhaban contained lies?" he asked the Prime Minister.

"I have nothing to say in this regard," the PM said adding the paper signed by the President was not the one showing you about another paper which we forwarded to the President before tabling the Bill in parliament.

Corruption
Sheikh Hasina said her party would not give nomination to any minister in the next general elections if found guilty of accumulating wealth through corrupt means.

The Prime Minister, replying to a query, said she had obtained statements of assets from all her cabinet colleagues.

"If proved that anyone of them had accumulated property through questionable means, my party will not give him nomination in the coming elections," said Hasina.

When a panel member drew her attention to the pledge for publishing white papers on property owned by the ministers, the Prime Minister said, "It may not be possible to publish such white papers every year. A white paper would have been necessary had there been

any case of accumulation of money or wealth through questionable means".

Hasina, however, told the questioner that she would not take the sole responsibility if the next government sued anyone of her cabinet colleagues on charges of corruption.

Terrorism
Sheikh Hasina reiterated that terrorists have no place in her party.

Answering a question from Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, she said that her party had taken stern action against party members involved in terrorist activities.

Law would be equally applied to all, the Prime Minister said replying to a question from Anam on how the Public Safety Act would be implemented in part since a good number of ruling party MPs were involved in various criminal activities — terrorism, corruption, grabbing of the river banks including that of the Buriganga, murder committed from the motor procession of an MP, taking possession of a commercial bank by breaking the locks by a party leader etc.

Disagreeing with the questioner, Hasina said that her party had expelled the leader involved in the bank incident "When the leader was chairman of that bank, he was ousted in the same process by people who are now in power in the bank".

Regarding grabbing of lands and terrorist activities, the Prime Minister told the Editor: "Publish those in your newspaper, make it clear. At the same time, let those who did such crimes have a chance to speak. You should prove that the incidents are true. And if any person actually committed such crimes, action would be taken against them."

Mahfuz Anam said that the crimes he mentioned were published many times in the newspapers. "Those were published again and again with pictures. Your government did not take any steps."

In response, the PM said not everything published in newspapers is always correct.

BSS adds: Hasina reiterated her call to the opposition leader to take part in a debate on television in presence of the countrymen.

The prime minister said: "If the opposition leader was present here tonight she (Khaleda) could take the opportunity to ask me questions."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina having a look at the model of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque where two minars, both 300ft high, will be build as part of its beautification programme.

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NDI study team leaves for Australia today

A nine-member study team, including seven parliamentarians, leaves Dhaka today for Australia on a week-long visit arranged by the National Democratic Institute, reports UNB.

The study team led by Prime Minister's Parliamentary Affairs Advisor Suranjit Sengupta will visit Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. Australian Agency for International Development is providing fund for the visit.

The other parliamentarians are: Dr M Selim Khaleda Khanam from Awami League, Khondakar Delwar Hossain and Dr Moeen Khan from BNP, Golam Mohammad Quader from Jatiya Party and Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury from Jamaat-e-Islami. The two other members of the team, Mahfuz Anam Editor of The Daily Star and Abul Ahsan, are from the Civil Society, said a press release.

The NDI programme is intended to enhance dialogue among members of Bangladesh's parliamentary parties and to strengthen the capacity of the parliament to assist its functioning as a democratic institution.

The study team is expected to return home on March 5.

Shahjalal Varsity Action Committee vows to continue agitation

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Feb 25: All-Party Action Committee (Opposition) has vowed to continue its agitation programme against the naming of different halls and buildings of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology.

Leaders of the committee at a Press Conference at the Sylhet Press Club this evening announced, they would continue the movement till the four-point demand were met. The demands are renaming of the buildings and halls after some of the companions saint of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA), ensuring 50 per cent students quota from the Sylhet region, immediate release of the Sangram Parishad activists, withdrawal of the cases filed against the activists of the Action Committee and immediate withdrawal of the VC and Professor Jafar Iqbal and exemplary punishment to them.

In the written statement they said that the President's (who is also the Chancellor of the varsity) order for placing issue before the Senate meeting is nothing but a mere move to create confusion among the people and to foil the movement.

Ariful Haque Chowdhury, General Secretary of District BNP, read out the written statement at the Press Conference while District BNP President MA Haque, Vice-President Advocate Nurul Haque, District JP President Advocate Giasuddin, City Jamaat Ameer Dr Shaifur Rahman, District Jamaat Ameer Moulana Habibur Rahman, IOJ leader Moulana Abdur Raquib Advocate were also present.

Dacoits kill 4 in Kishoreganj

By A Correspondent

KISHOREGANJ, Feb 25: Dacoits killed four people and decamped with about Tk 75,000 after breaking open an oil, fertilizer and pesticide dealers' shops at Katiadi Bazar under Katiadi thana of the district in the early hours of today.

The dacoits cut open the shop's corrugated iron sheet fencing and entered it between 3 to 4 am.

They battered a salt trader and three shop employees to death who were sleeping inside the shop. Police said after recording a case filed by shop owner Priyo Lal Roy with Katiadi thana, located only 500 yards from the Bazar.

According to preliminary report the victims — salt trader Shuklur Roy, 60, shop employees Dharendra Chandra Saha, 60, Shankar Saha, 19 and Bijoy Chakraborty, 30 went to bed after Priyo Lal Roy left the shop at 1 am.

Local MP Akhtaruzzaman and SP Kishoreganj visited the place of occurrence.

Held for drawing money from banks forging signature

Police have arrested six people in the city for their alleged involvement in forgery, and recovered Taka 39,000 and a cheque for Taka 1,20 lakh, reports BSS.

The arrested allegedly withdrew Taka 10 lakh from the head office of Arab Bangladesh Bank in Dilkusha Commercial Area, and Gulshan branch of City Bank by forging the signatures of the real account holders.

The arrested are Mohammad Fazle Ahad alias Litu, 38, Kabirul Islam alias Helal, 30, Manjurul Islam Khan, 35, Mohammad Ishak, 43, Zahurul Islam alias Zahar and Manjurul Haque Manju, 48.