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Down to Earth

One-way no long-term Panacea for traffic ills

By A S M Nurunnabi

Dhaka is known for stupendous traffic jam over all its other identities. Whatever the opinion of some sections city dwellers either in favour or critical of the one-way system of traffic control lately introduced in some of the city roads, there is at least an unanimity of opinion on one point: introduction of the new system has contributed to the diminution of traffic jams in some measure.

It is said that a modern city requires at least 25 per cent of road space out of its total area, whereas in our city there is only 7 per cent of road space available for use as roads. Parking space for vehicles is acutely scarce. City pavements are mostly under unauthorised occupation of hawkers. The city roads both in old and new parts of the rapidly burgeoning urban areas remain constantly under horrendous traffic tangles. In this scenario, the introduction of one-way traffic regulation may be regarded as a first step towards creating some measure of traffic discipline.

The important components of the newly introduced traffic discipline reportedly include the following: one-way passage for the stretch of the road running from Science Laboratory to Nilkhet road from Katabon via Hatirpool Linking with Bangla Motor Road and Sonargon Link Road.

Besides, decisions have been taken for construction of rickshaw lanes from Mohakhali to

the Kakrail Masjid road crossing. Rickshaw lanes are also planned for construction from Khamarbari to Mirpur No 10 Roundabout. It is not yet known when these rickshaw lanes will be taken up for construction.

It is understood that the city's traffic department has also other ideas for introducing one-way traffic on some more important roads of the city as soon as necessary manpower is available for the purpose.

There was a recent report that a total outlay of Tk 1,000 crore is fixed for implementing a co-ordinated project for easing the traffic medley in the metropolis. This project is to be implemented by the Dhaka City Corporation, RAJUK, Roads and Highways Department and seven other government agencies. The project was due for submission to the ECNEC for approval.

Whatever be the present stage of approval of that project, it seems worth-while to recall that the project covers a long time span beginning from 1998-99 to 2002-2009, incorporating both short-term and long-term plan components. For obvious reasons, there is greater interest and concern in respect of the short-term plan objectives.

As to the obvious reasons, it may be stated that the population of the metropolis has been increasing at a galloping speed. In this context, it may be noted that the objectives of the short-

term plans, in their essentials, include the construction of two fly-overs, one at Mohakhali, and the other at Jatra Bari; construction of 10 by-pass roads in the city to facilitate the movement of inter-district transport; improvement of 20 road junctions and provision of parking facilities in three important city areas. The most vital question at present seems to be whether these projected benefits will be available within the timeframe fixed in the short-term plans.

In the light of existing realities, there may be little scope for being optimistic about the short-term results. It is quite apparent that while the planned facilities will be under execution, the growth of the city population will continue apace with concomitant shortfalls in provisions of basic infrastructural needs.

The city dwellers are already experiencing nightmarish traffic congestions. The one-way traffic system on some city roads already introduced and more of such facilities to be introduced, may provide some relief by way of reducing traffic tangles, but some observers believe that these will be mere palliatives for a very limited time. To achieve more durable results, it is widely felt that the objectives of the co-ordinated project, with its short-term and long-term goals should be taken up for implementation without further delay.



Traffic jam has become a regular phenomenon at Paltan in the city due to digging of roads haphazardly. — Star photo

Power sector financial management

Outstanding bills increase despite reform measures

By Sharier Khan

The power sector continues to sink in the abyss of 'system loss' and 'revenue loss' despite recent attempts to improve financial management of the Power Development Board (PDB) and the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA). PDB's dues from bulk purchasers now total over Tk 2600 crore against Tk 2500 crore in January. DESA alone owes over Tk 1800 crore to PDB, sources said.

However, some administrative and reform measures in PDB in the last one year reduced its system loss from 24 per cent in May last year to 21 per cent in January this year. Bill collection has also increased to 80 per cent of the total power generation from 70-72 per cent earlier.

"Yet, these figures have not given us any significant benefit," said a source in the Energy Ministry. "The bottom line is, despite such important improvements, the total outstanding bill has increased."

Unlike PDB, DESA's own system loss, which is mostly theft of revenue by a section of its meter readers and ledger writers, is hovering around 25

per cent. This level is not going down because of lack of strong administrative measures and reforms, the sources said.

System loss in the Rural Electrification Board (REB), which was much lower than that in DESA and PDB earlier, increased in recent months. REB's system loss has gone up to 18 per cent now from around 15 per cent earlier.

REB officials claim this increase is temporary, mainly because of recent transfer of some high-system-loss PDB distribution zones to it. The 'negative impact' of these new zones will soon diminish with gradual improvement in its performance, they said.

But the main reason for gradual increase in outstanding bills in the power sector is increase in power tariff every six months as well as increase in power sales, the sources said.

DESA used to purchase power worth around Tk 70 crore per month from PDB less than a year ago. DESA's bill has gone up to Tk 100 crore in recent months. In the past, DESA used to pay Tk 50-60 crore to PDB per month, leaving a deficit of Tk 10-20 crore.

DESA has improved its total bill payment in terms of amount. But it can't pay more than Tk 75 crore, leaving a monthly deficit of around Tk 25 crore.

"So, every four months, PDB's revenue deficit is increasing by Tk 100 crore. Without drastic measures and improvement, there is no hope in sight," one source said.

Earlier this year, PDB had targeted reduction of its system loss to 18 per cent by the end of this month and emphasised increasing the bill collection ratio to 'over 100 per cent'. But these targets remained a far cry.

According to experts, PDB will be able to earn profit if it can reduce the system loss to below 20 per cent.

The other defaulters with PDB include government and private institutions and industrial, commercial and domestic clients. Financial mismanagement is also responsible for the huge unpaid dues of around Tk 500 crore in the power sector.

System loss alone is responsible for loss of over Tk 350 crore a year, the sources said.

CU stalemate puts future of 14000 students at stake

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Apr 21: The stalemate at Chittagong University (CU) has put the future of 14,000 at stake.

The deadlock followed a gunfight between Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) on the campus on December 19 that left two Shibir leaders killed.

Academic activities of the university have remained suspended for four months. Shibir, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and some other organisations of the university under the banner of All Party Student Alliance (APSA) have been demanding trial of the killers of December 19 incident.

APSA also has enforced an indefinite strike in the campus on February 1.

Meanwhile, students of the university are comprising for resumption of classes.

General students of the university brought out a silent procession from Tigerpass Crossing in the city at 10 am yesterday. The procession ended at New Market premises where the students formed a human chain. Student Solidarity, non-political student organisation of CU — also joined the human chain. Later, General

Students, CU announced a student-public rally at Chittagong Railway Station and a siege to the city residence of CU VC on April 24.

On the same day Democratic Student Alliance — an organisation comprising mainly CU units of Samajtantrik Chhatra Front and Bangladesh Chhatra Union — brought out a Padajatra (footmarch) demanding trial of all killings so far at the university, resumption of classes and restoration of congenial academic atmosphere at the university, defying a ban on rallies and processions at CU. The Padajatra started from Fatehabad and ended in a rally in front of academic building of the university. Some non-political personalities also expressed their solidarity to the Padajatra and addressed the rally echoing the demands of the general students. Presided over by Safa Jilhash the rally was addressed among others by Faruq-e-Azam, a veteran freedom fighter, Abul Momen, resident editor of the daily 'Prothom Alo' and Advocate Rana Dasgupta.

CU authorities banned political activities including rallies and processions on the campus.

Law & order did not improve even after PSA: CCHRB

By Staff Correspondent

Law and order across the country did not improve even after introducing tougher laws recently, observed the Coordination Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB).

On its report on incidents of crime on the first three months of the year the government introduced a Public Safety Act on February 15 to combat the incidents of crime particularly mugging, extortion, abduction, tender war, damaging and preventing movement of vehicles and terrorism.

The CCHRB prepared its report on the basis of newspaper reports and information collected by its own sources.

The report said 277 people were killed in March as against 200 of February and 276 of January. A total of 273 incidents of

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Does advise visitors not to meet ailing poet Obaidullah

By Staff Correspondent

Poet Abu Zafar Obaidullah's has been brought back to Dhaka from Singapore where he had undergone treatment.

When contacted last night, family sources said that although his condition is improving, doctors have advised that visitors should not be allowed to see him.

The poet's family expressed heartfelt gratitude to all for their support and prayers and hoped they would continue to pray for his early recovery and follow the doctors' advice.

The grand rally of freedom fighters (Muktijoddha-Janata) will be held at the historic Paltan Maidan in the city at 2 pm today, reports BSS.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will address the function as chief guest.

Saminalito Muktijoddha Front (SMF) is organising the rally to commemorate April 17, the historic Mujibnagar Day, to reunite the forces of Liberation War under a single umbrella.

SMF leaders exchanged views with over 35 professional bodies including lawyers, doctors, politicians and freedom fighters to make the rally a grand occasion.

The organisers said 10,000 freedom fighters wearing uniform and carrying the national flag will give a guard of honour to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Valiant freedom fighter Mahabubuddin, Bir Bikram, will conduct the guard of honour.

Murals and paintings depicting the struggling events, under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, from the 1952 Language Movement to the final victory of the nation on December 16, 1971, have been made to decorate the stage.

The freedom fighters, who will assemble at the rally from across the country, will take oath to resist the anti-liberation and fundamentalist forces who are out to destroy the democratic process and topple the elected government.

A 100-member convening committee and a 23-member steering committee were formed to make the grand rally a success.

Container crisis

Frozen shrimps worth Tk 300 cr lying at Mongla port

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Apr 21: Frozen shrimps worth about Taka 300 crore are lying at Mongla Port for shipment by exporters. The shipment is being delayed due to want of container vessels, said a reliable source.

Exporters of frozen shrimps will be incurring huge financial loss if importers fail to get their consignments by this month. These frozen shrimps are to be exported to Europe and America.

According to a source in the Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association (BFFEA), the deadline for LC will expire on April 30. Foreign buyers may cancel the LC in case of failure in shipment within the deadline. The buyers may reduce export price, the sources said.

This is the peak season for exporting frozen shrimps, one of the biggest foreign exchange earners of the country. Till February last, frozen shrimps worth 210 million dollars were exported from the country, 14 million dollars more than the target fixed.

At least three container vessels are required for exporting Tk 300 crore shrimps from Mongla Port by April 30, said Kazi Shahnewaz, President of BFFEA.

Crisis of container vessels may be disastrous for country's frozen shrimps sector so far as its export is concerned, the BFFEA president said adding that uninterrupted export may get over Taka 1500 crore in foreign exchange.

Khaleda goes to Feni tomorrow

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will visit the troubled Feni on April 23, reports BSS.

Khaleda will address a public meeting and meet party leaders and workers there, party sources said.

Till noon today, no container vessel was arranged for shipment on emergency basis to save the frozen shrimps from being damaged.

Authorities of Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) have also been requested to take necessary measures in this regard on emergency basis.

Meanwhile, exporters of raw jute are also suffering from the same. Problem of shipment due to indefinite strike by crew members of different kinds of water crafts, cargo launches and barges and engine boats.

Raw jute worth several crores of taka are lying at Mongla Port for shipment since crew members began the strike from first work of this month to press home their demands which the owners do not want to fulfil.

None arrested for murders on Wednesday

By Staff Correspondent

Police failed to arrest anyone in connection with the three separate murders of the city that took place within a span of five hours Wednesday night.

A case was filed with Dhanmondi police in connection with Jahangir Alam murder. Dhanmondi police said that none was arrested in this regard until yesterday evening.

None was arrested in connection with the murder of Selim, who was shot dead at Mirpur Mazar Road, police said yesterday. Selim was killed while returning from a hospital.

Shahjahan Bhuiyan was stabbed to death on Wednesday night by a gang of muggers in front of Shishu Park. A friend of Bhuiyan, was also stabbed by the gang. Ramna police which registered the case said they were yet to arrest anybody in this connection.

Kalaroa incident

17 chargesheeted under PSA

From Our Correspondent

SATKHIRA, Apr 21: Seventeen people were chargesheeted under PSA for terrorism at Kalaroa SSC centre on March 2. The accused include four from front organisations of ruling Awami League and four from that of BNP.

UNO Kalaroa Raisuddin in his case filed with Kalaroa PS said that the stampede that killed four persons including a SSC examinee and a female teacher was triggered by the party activists. Later unruly mob gheraoed him in the hospital for long five hours. They also ransacked and damaged the furniture of government and non-government offices at Kalaroa. The loss was estimated at Tk 1,50,000.

After investigation, sub-inspector Farooq submitted chargesheet against 17 people including Babu Kazi, his brother Kazi Shahjada, Tarun and Farooq of BCL and Jubo League and Ashraf, Biplob and Lucky of JCD and Jubo Dal.

The case was filed with Kalaroa police station on March 6.

Rupsha College closed sine die

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Apr 21: The Rupsha College was closed sine die apprehending clash between armed cadres of ruling Awami League and general students.

A notice was issued in this regard on Thursday afternoon, principal of the college said.

Armed cadres of the ruling party have been teasing female students of the college during the last two months that has vitiated the academic atmosphere, the principal said.

The musclemen of the local ruling party MP's younger brother allegedly tried to kidnap two female students this month. They always create panic among the students and teachers by resorting to gangsterism on the campus without any provocation, said a college source.

Duma ratifies CTBT

MOSCOW, Apr 21: Russia's lower house of parliament ratified the global nuclear test ban treaty today, giving President-elect Vladimir Putin a moral boost ahead of planned arms talks in the United States next week, reports Reuters.

The State Duma voted in closed session by 298 to 74 in favour of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), with three abstentions.

The treaty has been ratified by an overwhelming majority. This is an important step towards preventing the spread of nuclear weapons," Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told reporters.

The communists, the largest single party in the Duma, expressed concern about backing a treaty still not ratified by the United States, China and other key states.

JU student beaten up in front of father

From JU Correspondent

A student of Jahangirnagar University (JU) was reportedly beaten up before his father by some other students of the university at its Al-Beruni Hall early yesterday.

Anwar Hossain Jiban, a third year honours student of anthropology was taken to the University Medical Centre and later admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Sources said about 26 students of Meer Mosharrat Hossain Hall went to the room of Jiban at Al-Beruni Hall at about 12 a.m. on Friday. They asked his father, Mokbul Hossain who came to see Jiban, about his whereabouts. The father told them that Jiban was sleeping in the nearby room.

They dragged Jiban out of the room and beat him. They also threatened to kill him if he disclosed their names.

Later, students of Al-Beruni Hall brought out a procession at about 1.30 a.m. protesting the attack and submitted a memorandum to the Vice-Chancellor.

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Hope of 132 examinees fades

Special arrangements next year, says PM

By Staff Correspondent

The government will make special arrangement next year for holding examinations of 132 girl students of Motiheel Model College who are agitating for appearing at this year's HSC examinations.

This was said by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a press conference at the Gana Bhavan yesterday.

The PM said the students should not be allowed to violate rules and warned of action against those responsible for the problem.

She regretted that the opposition politicised the matter. "It is unfortunate that the opposition is trying to make it a political issue."

Negligence by the teachers and the students caused the problem, Hasina said and blamed them for not following rules.

UNB adds: The guardians of 132 HSC examinees of Motiheel Model School & College will submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister on Sunday demanding that their children be allowed to appear at the HSC examinations and protesting the statement of the Education Minister.

The guardians at a meeting yesterday morning decided to gather at the college premises at 9 am on Sunday and proceed towards the PM office.

Fayez Ullah Bhuiyan, Jafar Ahmed Bhuiyan, SM Shahjahan, Hamidul Huq, Mizanur Rahman, Mesbah Uddin and Suriya Huq attended the meeting, said a press release.

Dhaka Education Board blocked 132 female students from taking part in the examinations, beginning April 27, since they allegedly did not follow the rules while filling up their registration forms two years ago.

The examinees have been agitating since early this month demanding Board's permission to take the exams under special arrangements.

Byelection in Rajshahi today

From Page 1

Ansars have already been deployed to maintain law and order. Two army teams have been stationed at the two thana headquarters to face any emergency situation. Several 'striking teams' of BDR will patrol the whole area.

A total of 113 magistrates, one in each polling centre will be on duty. Besides, ten mobile teams, each under one magistrate, will supervise the polling. The Additional District Magistrate of Rajshahi will coordinate maintenance of law and order.

The by-election has virtually become a race between Nurul Islam Thandu, a member of AL National Executive Committee and Raihanul Abedin Raihan, general secretary of Charghat Thana Awami League. Sources said Raihan enjoys a massive support of local party workers.

Earlier, independent candidates Brig (Rtd) Anisur Rahman, Azizul Azam and Tossad-

dek Hossain, all leaders of Awami League, withdrew from the race.

Jatiya Party (Ershad-Manzur) candidate Abdul Gafur Shah has also withdrawn. Among others, independent candidates Ziaur Rahman, Shushanta Sarker, Krishak Sadek and Nuruzzaman Sarker have not been seen in the election campaign from the very beginning.

The Rajshahi-5 seat fell vacant following the death of Mohammad Alauddin on February 26.

Another by-polls was held in the constituency on December 8 last year when the seat was declared vacant by the Election Commission due to floor-crossing by Alauddin.

Alauddin, a former President Member of Awami League, joined BNP and was elected MP on a BNP ticket from the constituency in 1996 general election. Later, he returned to Awami League.

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