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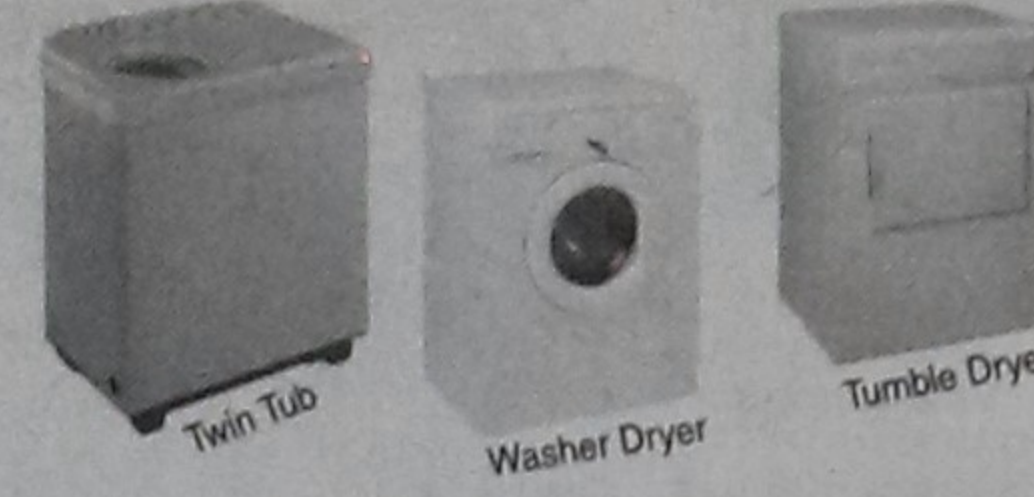
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## Down to Earth

# Impromptu bazars near city offices

By A S M Nurunnabi

It has become the current trend that a *kutchra* bazar can be set up anywhere in the city to meet the needs of a local area. For this purpose, no formal permission or authorisation from the concerned quarter seems needed. On this account, impromptu bazars have become a ubiquitous phenomenon, particularly near city offices, where such bazars even spill over to adjacent roadside pavements, creating difficulties of passage for pedestrians. In some areas of the city, the proximity to set up such bazars near office complexes of government, semi-government and other important agencies has grown into a characteristic feature of city life. In consequence, the helpless pedestrians are sometimes forced to forsake the comparative safety of movement on roadside pavements and thrown into the hazards of vehicular traffic on the open roads.

These bazars appear to conduct a thriving business mostly during the period of operation of these offices. Besides the normal merchandise sold in a *kutchra* bazar, such as vegetables, fruits, meat, and fish, a wide variety of commodities required for normal living including dress materials, *lungis*, vests, sarees and ready-made garments are available here. One main reason for attraction of these bazars is that the nu-

merous employees of the offices localised in these areas find the easy accessibility of these bazars quite a boon. During lunch breaks or at the end of office hours, many of those employees fan out into these bazars to make purchases of things needed for their families in a comparatively less congested environment without going through the hustle and bustle of regular bazars.

Other causes of attraction for these bazars are reportedly the availability of the daily essential commodities at prices much lower than those at regular bazars, the reason being that in many cases, the growers of agricultural commodities in particular, themselves come down to the city areas to sell their wares without going through intermediaries. The lower prices of many commodities at these places constitute an incentive for many employees of the nearby offices to buy their requirements here. Because of the price advantages at these places, many people from other areas of the city also throng these bazars to make their purchases.

There are some well-known office-based *kutchra* bazars in city areas. We may cite, for example, the areas in front of the office of the Accountant-General and the double-phased office complexes at Segunbagicha, the areas adjacent to the

Bangladesh Bank and its attached offices, and the stretch of road pavements alongside Topkhana Road by the side of the corporate branch of the Sonali Bank.

Besides the economy in prices obtainable at these places, another important factor for the popularity of these bazars is that the city dwellers, who are steadily swelling, are so much caught up in the activities of commuting to their places of work and their normal occupations that they find little time for making regular visits to the city's normal bazars. In this context, the wayside bazars prove to be handy and more convenient, apart from the economy factor. The important thing to observe is that with the steady growth of the city population, the trading activities of these wayside bazars have demonstrated a spectacular rise.

The way-side city bazars are not an unmixed blessing. Their existence to cater to the needs of the low-income groups of people though felt to be inevitable, it has posed problems of encroachments on roads and pavements in many city areas to which the civic authority cannot remain blind. The need, therefore, is to plan for their suitable rehabilitation, keeping in view the interests of clean, orderly environment in city life.



German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (R) shakes hands with French President Jacques Chirac yesterday at the Liebfrauen square before the start of the 75th Franco-German summit.

—AFP photo

## Sharif's lawyers boycott trial

ATTOCK, Pakistan, June 9: Defence lawyers today boycotted the proceedings of an anti-corruption court when it resumed hearing of a case against deposed Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif, reports AFP.

The court recorded the statements of two prosecution witnesses, both retired army colonels, who said they were involved in the private purchase of a Russian Mi-8 helicopter by Sharif in 1993.

Sharif, who was present in the court which met in the 16th century Attock Fort 80 kilometers (50 miles) northwest of Islamabad, refused to cross-examine the witnesses, saying his lawyers had boycotted the trial. He told judge Farrukh Latif that authorities "brought me forcibly" to the court.

The former prime minister, who was charged with concealment of his assets and tax evasion last week, is being held in a cell at the fort.

His lawyers have boycotted the trial claiming the atmosphere in the high security fort was "not conducive" for the trial.

Sharif, who has called the charges "bogus," told the court today the military government which ousted him in a coup in October last year had already decided his guilt.

But judge Farrukh replied that he would decide the case "on merit."

"I will myself write the judgement," he said. The case was filed by the army-led National Accountability Bureau, which said Sharif failed to show the helicopter purchase in his tax returns.

Sharif's close aide, Saifur Rahman, has also been arraigned for allegedly helping to arrange the purchase of the helicopter, officials said.

Sharif, 52, was sentenced to a life term by a Karachi anti-terrorism court on April 6 on charges of hijacking and terrorism.

He was found guilty of attempting to prevent a flight carrying then-army chief General Pervez Musharraf and 198 passengers from landing at

Karachi.

Musharraf landed safely and arrested Sharif within hours.

After recording the statements of the witnesses Niaz Hussain Siddiqui and Chief Pilot Mohammad Zareef, the judge adjourned the proceedings until Saturday.

A case has been lodged with Motiheel police.

## 25 injured as followers of peers clash in city

By Staff Correspondent

At least 25 people were injured in a clash between followers of Peer of Charmonai, leader of Islamic Constitution Movement, and Peer of Dewanbagh at the south gate of Baitul Mokarram in the city yesterday.

Of the injured, 10 were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The clash erupted when followers of Dewanbagh, backed by activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir, chased supporters of Charmonai out of Baitul Mokarram south gate after Juma prayers.

Followers of Charmonai under the supervision of Nurul Huda Farayzi had gathered at Baitul Mokarram south gate after the prayers to protest alleged bomb attack on the vehicle of their Peer in Bogra two months ago.

The followers blamed the activists of Shibir, student front of Jamaat-e-Islami, for the attack.

Panic spread in the nearby area. Police clubbed the rival groups to restore normalcy, witnesses said.

A press release issued by the Islamic Constitution Movement confirmed the clash and said the organisation later held its rally at the north gate of Baitul Mokarram. The organisation will also hold a press conference at its party office at Purana Paltan today to protest the incident, the release said.



Followers of the peers of Charmonai and Dewanbagh engaged in violent clash near the Baitul Mokarram mosque yesterday. At least 25 people were injured.

—Star photo

## Franco-German summit on

MAINZ, June 9: Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and French President Jacques Chirac opened the 75th Franco-German summit on Friday determined to portray Europe's key alliance as strong — amid signs it may be weakening, reports AP.

In a demonstration of mutual commitment in this Rhine River city, the leaders agreed to jointly develop new satellite and radar systems that would address deficiencies in the Europeans' surveillance capabilities revealed during NATO's war on Kosovo last year.

Germany also will join France and Britain in purchasing Airbus A400M military transport aircraft, abandoning interest in a competing airplane being developed by Russia, the Antonov An-7X, according to the declaration on forging a stronger European defence identity.

In a nod to Germany's wish

to bolster faltering economies in ex-Soviet states, the declaration says Germany and France will look for ways to include Russian and Ukrainian companies in building the Airbus The A400m, which still has no prototype, would have twice the capacity and fly 30 per cent faster than the C-130s it would replace.

The planned procurement should address French concerns that Germany's military is not as compatible with the French as they would like, especially as they move toward more integration.

European Union leaders agreed at their December summit in Helsinki, Finland, to move ahead with developing a European military force that could respond to crises without the aid of the United States.

French Defence Minister Alain Richard underlined the concerns in an interview with the influential Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on Thurs-

day, saying that France's defence and security policies are closer to Britain's than Germany's.

That's just one of the areas in which the Franco-German relationship, bound by the close friendship between the late former French President Francois Mitterrand and ex-Chancellor Helmut Kohl, has shown signs of fraying in recent years.

Germany was upset when France echoed US concerns about its first candidate to succeed Michael Camdessus at the International Monetary Fund. And French Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who is at the summit, caused a furor when he said recently that Germany had not been cured of its Nazi past — an attack on German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer's proposal for a federal-style system to run the European Union as it expands from 15 nations to include a dozen newcomers. He has since apologised.

## Two fake PMO officials held

The Special Branch of Police arrested last night two alleged cheats who posed as officials of the Prime Minister's Office from the city's Jhigatola and Motiheel areas, reports BBS.

A team of city SB nabbed Obaidul Haque from the office of Fauji Chalkal when he along with gang members were trying to cheat the managing director of the jute mill.

On the basis of information divulged by Obaidul, police later arrested Abu Taher Mohammad Mostafa Mintu, the ring leader, who impersonated as a senior director (Admin) of the PM's Office, from his residence at Jhigatola.

Police said Mintu demanded Tk 1 lakh from the MD of the mill using false pads of the Prime Minister's Office and personal pad of the home minister.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the gang used to cheat people using the same tactic.

They were taken into four-day police remand for interrogation.

A case has been lodged with Motiheel police.

## Swipe at Saifur

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commented on those from an accountant's point of view.

Kibria, however, said, "I am ready to consider any serious and constructive suggestion. Even I am ready to change any of my proposals in the light of constructive criticism."

But the comments made by Saifur Rahman are not well intended, he said. "Did they manipulate the statistics of BBS when they were in power?" Kibria asked. But he admitted that there is scope to improve the method of collecting statistics.

Pointing at the Finance Secretary, Chairman of the National Board of Revenue, the Bangladesh Bank Governor, ERD and Planning secretaries who were present at the press conference, Kibria said there is no point in questioning the merit of the budget as the same set of officials, who worked during the BNP rule, formulated the current budget.

State Minister for Planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir challenged Saifur Rahman to

prove that any of the information given by the BBS is not correct. "But we want to modernise BBS."

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said Saifur Rahman should have based on BBS figures his claim that agricultural production increased during BNP rule.

She hoped that the former finance minister would refrain from making such comments in future.

Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed said, "It is unfortunate that Saifur Rahman is presently making more mistakes as regards facts and figures."

Saifur Rahman used to quote BBS figures when he was finance minister during BNP rule but he is now accusing BBS, Tofail recalled.

"It is our tradition that there are always two groups, one for opposing the budget and the other for supporting it. One group criticises the budget proposals no matter how good or bad those are while the other hails those," he said.

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**Enrolment going on**

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